

Elinor Colhouse
by
Stephen Hudson



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ELINOR COLHOUSE

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ELINOR COLHOUSE
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To the memory of
Charles Louis Philippe

CHAPTER I

i

THE morning was a most inconvenient time to receive a stranger, especially that morning, as she had been washing her hair, and besides, that ornery half-breed help never got her work done till dinner-time. But there was Richard Kurt waiting downstairs to see her. She began hastily doing up her hair, which, though not as silky as she would have liked, was thick and could be speedily what she called "wadged into shape." She "wadged" it, therefore, and put on her dress, the fastenings of which she had been altering while her hair dried. Pinning down the front with various brooches and scarfpins, gifts from different admirers, she read again the letter she had received the previous day from Frank Waters.

"My dear Nell,—I've just unselfishly given young Richard Kurt a note of introduction to you. He's the nephew of Mr Theophilus Kurt, President of the C. W. and M., who is now in London. Richard's father is rich. I'm not high-flier enough for you.

"He asked if you were a flirt and I told him, as you were the prettiest girl in the South, you might be with some people, I only knew you as what I remain, your old friend,

"F. W."

Glancing in the mirror, she rubbed her nose with an old powder leather and went downstairs.

The young man came towards her from the arm-chair beside the fireplace. He looked hardly more than a boy, tall and very slight. The shutters were half closed, but she could see that his hair was lightish, that his eyes were dark and that he had a little fair moustache.

"I hope I haven't come at an

inconvenient hour, Miss Colhouse?" His accent was very English.

"Not at all. I'm delighted. When did you arrive?" She dropped gracefully and so lightly into the old arm-chair with a broken spring that it didn't even creak, while he stood, stick and straw hat in hand.

"Early this morning. I thought I'd come at once because I shan't be staying long." He fidgeted a little, then sat down at her suggestion.

"Don't you like Manitou?"

"I don't know it, do I? It's not the sort of place I expected. As far as I can make out, there's no sport to be got."

Elinor was prepared for this point of view. In New York, those who were not sportsmen talked as though they were.

"Do you hunt in England?" She asked the question as though it didn't make any difference whether he did or not, but New York had taught her that the hunting brand was the best.

"When I get the chance."

"I suppose your people do."

He laughed. "You should see the governor on a horse."

"Your father isn't a sportsman then?"

"Well, you see, his idea of riding is what he learnt when he came to London as a boy and rode in the Park on Sundays. He hasn't got any seat at all. Now mother can ride. She's got a perfect seat and hands; she's a born horsewoman." He spoke eagerly. She felt he had a lot to say about his mother.

"Where did she learn?"

"Oh, I don't know. Picked it up, I suppose."

She was puzzled. What did he mean by picking it up. "I suppose she lived in the country?"

"I don't know where mother lived before she married the governor." His eyes were dark and penetrating when hers met them, but he frequently looked away, as though he thought he was staring. He

spoke very distinctly and his manner was eager and jerky, with an occasional nervous gesture.

In answer to his inquiry she told him she lived in Waterville but had just come from New York, where she had been visiting a friend. She was aware he was looking at her closely though she pretended not to notice. He appeared to have nothing more to say and she gazed towards the opening in the half-shuttered window. He was on her left, the best side of her profile, as it happened, though both were so good it hardly mattered. She sat back with grace in the low arm-chair, her arms, bare to the elbow, along the sides and her tapering fingers clasping the edges. Her dress was a little open at the neck and her breast rose and fell rhythmically. She turned, creating another pose, as he got up.

"I must be going ; it's lunch-time. May I come back this afternoon ? I should like to call on Mrs Colhouse."

She restrained any sign of satisfaction. "My mother will be very pleased. We could go for a walk if you like and come back here after."

"I should love to." He went lightly to the door, opening it to a flood of sunshine which lit up his light, straight hair and made him look younger than ever.

But it was the impression she made on him that mattered and she hoped he had taken an alluring portrait away with him.

ii

Her bedroom window commanded the path which was a short cut to the hotel and she watched him from behind the curtain. Again his extreme youthfulness struck her; he did not look more than eighteen. His figure was unmistakably that of a gentleman; his loose-fitting tweed suit and brown shoes were un-American.

Her self-made blue dimity dress was suitable for a short walk on a summer afternoon. Its flimsiness set off her slight,

graceful figure ; the open neck edged with lace displayed her mellow olive skin. The red roses drooping over the brim of her leghorn hat against her blue-black hair matched the touch of artifice on her lips and cheeks. Two dark red roses lay on the dressing-table, and as she entered the sitting-room she held them to her finely cut nostrils, standing on the threshold while he came towards her. His admiration, though restrained, was obvious. Any man she knew would have greeted her with a flattering allusion to what she was aware was an artistic presentation of herself. He made none.

“How kind of you to take me out, but it’s awfully hot for a walk.”

“We needn’t go far and we can sit down somewhere in the shade.”

They strolled by the side of the lake till they reached a small path which led upwards gently, through stretches of heather, to a timber gate with pine-trees on either side. They had hardly spoken

till she asked him to lift the top bars. Slightly raising her skirt, she gave a little run and, touching the lowest bar lightly with her foot, bounded forward like a bird. A few steps farther on were some felled fir-trees to which she pointed with her parasol.

"You mustn't sit on them in that pretty dress." He threw off his jacket and laid it where she could sit with comfort. She disposed herself gracefully and he threw himself down beside her.

"Do you think you can bear a day or two longer here?" She gazed down at him with a demure expression in her large dark eyes.

"Of course, this is delightful," he broke off lamely. "Do you mind my smoking a pipe?"

"No; I like them." No American she knew smoked a pipe.

"I'm sorry, the pouch is in the pocket—may I?"

She moved herself just enough for him

to feel in the pocket; in extracting the pouch he had to put his hand partly under her thigh and he flushed.

She took no notice of his embarrassment and lay back, displaying carelessly a shapely silk-clad calf. He lit his pipe and leant his back against the log upon which she was sitting. A minute passed; neither spoke. A bird called in the distance, another answered it, there was a faint lapping of water from the lake beyond. He jumped up and stood facing her.

"I don't mean to fall in love with you, you know."

She lifted her face slowly and smiled.

"Who thought about such a thing, Mr Kurt?" It was the first time she had given him a name.

"I've thought about it. How can one help it when one's with you?"

"That's very flattering." Her tone was bantering.

"Don't laugh at me. I want to be

friends with you but I don't want to flirt. I don't know how to. I always wonder what these Americans say to girls. They seem to be able to go on all day every day talking to them. What on earth do they talk about? What am I to talk to you about?" He looked her squarely in the eyes.

She laughed but she knew it was not the right laugh for the occasion. Her laugh was a source of anxiety. She couldn't get it right, though she had made a special study of it even at theatres.

"Tell me about your life in England. I'd love to hear about that."

She indicated that he should sit down beside her again. He did so, pulling valiantly at his pipe.

"I don't know where to begin. Besides, I've been gone a year."

"Have you been a year in Cliftonburg?"

"No; thank God. I was in Canada for nine months with Billy Kartwright."

"Do you mean Sir William Leicester

Kartwright, who married Isolde Allones?" She knew all about the Kartwrights from *Town Topics* and if Richard Kurt was a friend of theirs he must be very well connected.

"Yes. You see, he was in the governor's business. I don't know what he did there—not much, I should think. They got up a big farming company; the governor put money into it. The company owned land at different places along the line between Medicine Hat and Calgary and Billy Kartwright went along in a caboose organising settlements." He paused and considered an instant. "It was a fine scheme, but when the labourers found out that the Canadians got double as much as they'd contracted for they turned it down. Billy Kartwright did it all on a grand scale. He got over I don't know how many Polled Angus and Galloway bulls, Clydesdale stallions and Roscommon rams, and they all went wrong—got sick or something—

and when the snow came they half starved ; they couldn't feed in the snow like the native-bred ones could. The imported ploughs were no good for the soil ; nothing was any good. And Kartwright made his friends managers of the farms, Public School fellows and all that, who didn't know the West and took the whole thing as a sort of sporting scheme. One got up a scratch pack of hounds ; another started laying out a cricket pitch——" His pipe had gone out ; he began relighting it. "You can imagine the rest," he said, between the puffs.

"And what did Sir William Kartwright do?"

"He went off home with his wife and left Blackett and me to run the show." He paused. "Well, perhaps not exactly that. He appointed a Scotch land bailiff general manager but the labourers collared him and stuck him in a cage. He looked like a baboon anyhow." He lay back and laughed heartily at the recollection.

"But where is Sir Leicester Kartwright now?" Elinor was not interested in what happened to the bailiff.

"In England, trying to put things right with his shareholders. I think the governor expected to lose his money, and only took shares to please Kartwright and get me a job. You see, the governor's got a big business. Of course they spend a lot of money, especially my mother; he doesn't seem to care what she spends." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe on his heel and looked up at her. "I love her to spend a lot of money and have everything. She ought to; there's no one like her. But he kicks up a row about my spending a few pounds more than my allowance, and keeps me out here when I want to go to the 'varsity."

Elinor was puzzled and was framing a non-committal remark, when he got up suddenly and added: "I say, I'm cracked to go on saying all this. That's the worst of me. I can't stop talking

when I get started. But please don't think I always do it. I don't know why I did to-day, except that——" He paused, and as he stood looking at her his brown eyes glistened.

She rose gracefully to her feet and, slipping her hand inside his arm, pressed it gently.

"I say, you are kind." He kept her hand close to his side as they walked slowly on together.

iii

They found Mrs Colhouse sitting in the porch, talking across the rose fence to Mrs Shuter, who, Elinor considered, was a common old woman. She shot a displeased glance at her mother, turning her back to the boundary, on the other side of which the objectionable neighbour was sitting under a laburnum-tree. When Elinor presented Richard Kurt to her mother, she was unpleasantly conscious that he had noticed her ungra-

ciousness. The deference of his attitude towards Mrs Colhouse and his remark, obviously intended for the ignored neighbour to overhear: "How nice for you to have such a charming garden next door. Isn't that laburnum lovely?" increased her irritation.

Richard placed a chair for her with its back to the fence, but she ignored the attention and entered the house. Just like mammy to give her away like that with her po' white trash. She flew upstairs, and in her annoyance threw her pretty leghorn hat on the bed with a vehemence that turned it over on its bent brim in a state of abject disgrace. After she had powdered her nose, she felt sorry for it and, giving it one or two restoring pokes, replaced it on her head. When she had removed her shoes and put on high-heeled slippers, dipped her hands in cool water and sprayed herself with essence of lilac, especially after she had taken a good look at herself in the mirror, she felt better.

All the Mrs Shuters in the world couldn't alter the fact of her uncommon beauty, and if he thought she had a temper, let him. A girl with a face and figure like hers had a right to a good deal more than temper. She went slowly downstairs, humming and, standing well inside the door, where Mrs Shuter couldn't see her, suggested their coming into the house. Cold tea and some cakes were on the table, which Mrs Colhouse began serving, but Kurt insisted that she should sit down and offered her the first glass and the plate with sliced lemon. Why did he make such a point of handing everything to mammy first? She made an effort to repress her feelings, but she could not force herself to join in the conversation, and though he looked at her shyly now and then while he talked, she returned monosyllables and he soon got up and said he must be going.

"You have been so kind. I will come and say good-bye before I go."

For an instant her spirits sank, but she collected herself and asked: "There's a dance at the hotel this evening, isn't there?"

"A dance? I didn't know. I say, do come." He advanced into the little sitting-room again. "And you too, Mrs Colhouse, won't you?"

"Mr Kurt, I haven't been to a dance for twenty years, but I daresay Nell will go."

"If there is one, may I come and fetch you?" He looked anxiously at Elinor.

"If you like. But I must know at once."

With a hurried good-bye he ran up the garden path.

"A nice fool you made me look."

"Why how, Nell?"

"I've told you to keep away from Mrs Shuter."

"But, my dear, I can't be rude to our neighbour, and you wearing her roses too."

"I'll pay for them, come to that. I don't want her around when I've got company. She'll get cackling about all

sorts of things. I've told you that ever so often."

"But surely that English boy don't matter. He's too young to count, isn't he?"

Elinor felt her temper rising but she restrained herself. "Now, mammy, you listen to me. I know Richard Kurt's young, but he's the best chance I've ever had and probably shall ever have. His parents live in London, and they've got a big position there. You know I've always wanted to marry an Englishman. His father's rich—how rich I don't know. He says he's got no money himself, but that don't matter, he will have. And I mean to marry him if I can and chance it. That's all there is about it."

Mrs Colhouse threw herself back in her chair and gazed at her daughter with astonished eyes. "Marry him, that baby, and you only saw him to-day for the first time. Lord 'a' mercy. You'd be taking a kid to raise."

Elinor made an impatient sound with her tongue against the back of her teeth. "See here, mammy, you know I've got sense and you know the sort of life we lead. Now I'm determined to get out of it myself and get you out too."

"How did you get to know him?" Mrs Colhouse asked.

"Frank Waters gave him a letter to me."

Mrs Colhouse looked up inquiringly.

"You remember the time Sissie Warren went up to Cliftonburg to that great ball where there was a baron and came back with her head buzzing full of it. That ball was given by Mr Theophilus Kurt, this boy's uncle, and he's the president of the C.W. & M. He's in London now."

Mrs Colhouse stared at Elinor through her spectacles with a startled expression. "And what would he say to it all? He'd never want that boy to get engaged while he's away."

Elinor went to the mirror over the

mantel and pulled a long pin out of her hat. "I don't intend to be engaged to him when his uncle comes back." She calmly arranged a curl beside her temple.

"Then what do you mean to do?"

Elinor turned round and tiptoed across the room to her mother's chair with her finger on her lips. "I mean to be married to him," she whispered.

iv

There was a dance at the hotel, and by eight o'clock the combined intensive labours of Elinor and her mother had wrought so great a change in what she called her "old blue rag" that only an expert could have identified it as the one she wore with such success at the Pomegranate Club Ball two years before. It was of blue velvet, with black guipure and bead ornaments. The sleeves were like elongated balloons. Elinor, born strategist of the wardrobe that she was, laid her plans against emergency well in

advance. At odd moments for some time past she had bespangled two square yards or so of the turquoise blue velvet with faceted bits of jet, replacing therewith the more meagre and less salient sleeves of an earlier period. There were other modifications of more or less significance, but it was the final assembling of the parts that had called for her extreme ingenuity under pressure of time. The effort made so heavy a demand upon her nerves that by the time the work of art had reached safety point her appetite had been completely cut and her only preparation for the evening's contingencies was a glass of cold tea. Mrs Colhouse had stood nobly in the breach, meeting difficulties as they arose, and supplying reinforcements of needles, threads, hooks, eyes, beads, tucks and so forth whenever requisitioned. It was hardly to be expected that such an enterprise could be brought to a successful conclusion without one or two small reverses.

One came when, daintily underclothed, perfumed and curled, Elinor raised her arms for her dress to be slipped over her head. A hook caught a strand of hair ; it might have been—ought to have been—avoided. It was true that Mrs Colhouse was not so young as she had been, that she had had no supper and had taken off her spectacles just before to rub her eyes, but it was maddening for Elinor, of whom that coiffure had demanded at least twenty minutes of precious time. She stamped with helpless rage as her mother, making matters worse in her misguided attempts to disentangle the tress, brought the whole delicate fabric crumbling down in ruin

“ Oh, mammy, you old fool, you’ve done for my hair ; and oh, oh, you’re hurting—you’re hurting. Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! ” and she broke into sobs. It was an awful moment, but Elinor surmounted it. Brushing her mother aside, restraining her tears and concentrating her will, she defeated the hook, extricated her head and drew the

dress down, standing a little dishevelled and breathing hard, but ready, if necessary, for another punishing round. It came. This time it really was a case of criminal negligence. Mammy had actually sewn two hooks where eyes ought to have been, and vice versa. Elinor stood motionless, too overcome for utterance. The little brass clock derisively indicated twenty minutes to nine. "Did ever anyone——? Was there ever such a born fool, such a doggorned idiot——?"

A sound struck on her ear as though it were in the room; she turned sharply round. Through the window, open to the vault of heaven and to the path leading to the hotel, she saw Richard Kurt, and at that instant the sound stopped. He had been whistling. Now, silent and without looking up, he disappeared from her view as he made his way below her to the front of the house.

"And to think, besides everything else, you left that window open!"

She flung the words at her mother ; it was past bearing.

To Mrs Colhouse's half-frightened "Do you think he saw you?" she did not vouchsafe an answer.

He apologised for being unable to take her to the hotel in a cab; none were available. At this she laughed. "Hacks in Manitou! Now if you'd asked for a buggy——"

"A buggy! Of course. I'd not thought of that."

She was pinning a chiffon scarf round her hair.

"I'm glad you didn't. It would have blown me about more and it's only a few steps. Would you take these?" Her manner was graciousness itself as she handed him her dancing slippers, daintily tied up with blue ribbon. He turned them over, fingering them. "I say, you have got small feet."

The wind blew pretty stiffly in their faces as they mounted the slight ascent. It

went clean through her thin ball dress, over which she had thrown a light cashmere shawl, an old possession of her mother's. On almost any other occasion the discomfort of the walk, the feeling of disarrangement, would have put her on bad terms with herself, but this evening she battled on cheerfully and when he apologised for the breeze she said she enjoyed it.

They had passed through the crowded lobby together and stood at the entrance of the ballroom. She was enjoying the sensation their entrance had created. She knew she was the loveliest amongst the many pretty girls as she was the best dressed. She knew too that the arrival on the scene of Kurt was an event, not only because his clothes were noticeably well cut and his whole appearance elegant, nor was it because his hair was parted at the extreme left side of his head and brushed straight back in a fashion no man there would have ventured, even had he thought of it. What it was she did not

exactly know, but perhaps it was his general Englishness that made him superior to the other men. And what pleased her still more was that the other men knew it and disliked him for it and that the girls knew it also and envied her. When he remarked: "I'm afraid we'll have to sit it out; I can't dance like that," she muttered, half absently: "Like what?" In her pleased absorption she had not grasped the meaning of his words and it was only when he added: "We don't reverse in England, you know," that her attention was roused. She knew that everything he did and said would be critically noticed, that their manner together was under scrutiny, but she did not waver. "We'll dance as you dance in England."

He stood with his arm extended, and she, taking two gliding steps, swung him into the midst of the dancers. He had an ear for time but no idea of dancing.

"Just swing with me," she whispered. "Let yourself go; I'll steer."

He did as she told him. It was not a perfect success but it was near enough. They circled up and down. With every turn he improved; before the waltz was finished he had got into the step.

"That'll do for now. Take me into the lobby."

"I say, you are a splendid dancer. I never could have got through without you." He looked at her, admiration in his eyes.

"I suppose I do dance well." Her tone was careless. "I like the way you hold me. Mind you always hold me like that. I hate that close way."

His way of holding was very effective; if she could improve his step they would look perfect together.

"I know what you mean, but they do dance well, don't they? In England men dance awfully badly. Most of them don't dance at all, and reversing's barred. At the hunt balls they stop you; it's considered caddish to reverse, but that's

because they go round and round like teetotums. They wouldn't bar it if they danced like you do here."

They danced together the whole evening. He got absorbed in the steps and improved each time. A few men came up and asked her for dances, but she declined coldly. Not a woman came near her, but he did not notice nor did he look at anyone.

He talked of nothing but dancing on their way back, and when they reached the cottage gate he hadn't finished what he wanted to say. She went in and turned up the lamp in the little hall while he stood watching her, uncertain whether to go at once or linger.

"Good-night." She held out her hand and he took it with reluctance. "I hate leaving you. May I come and see you to-morrow?"

"It's two o'clock. To-morrow will be Wednesday, and you said you were going away."

“But I shan’t. I shan’t go until——”

She waited for him to finish the sentence, smiling half-teasingly.

“You know what I mean,” he faltered.

“Indeed I don’t.”

Taking refuge in action, he threw his cape across his shoulders and lighted a cigarette, then stood looking at her as though he wanted to say something but couldn’t find the words. She was leaning with her back against the wooden mantel-piece; the only light came from the flickering lamp in the hall, which, she noticed, smelt horribly. He turned abruptly and went to the open door, stopped again, came back into the room.

“When may I come—after lunch?”

“You can come to lunch if you’ll put up with it.”

“How sweet of you. I should love to. Good-night.”

She locked the front door and went slowly upstairs. She was tired, but she was not at all sleepy. What a boy he

was—how different from any she had known! Was it wise to have asked him to a meal? When he saw how they lived, he might think less of her. Would he believe that though poor old mammy was very southern and provincial she was a lady? These were risks, but risks that had to be run; there was no time to lose. She lit the candles on her dressing-table, peering at herself in the glass, took up a hand mirror and had a good look at each side of her head and the back as well. She pulled her arms out of the wide sleeves and took another long look at herself. She stepped out of her dress and petticoat and stood an instant in her thin silk vest. The looking-glass upon the chest of drawers was too high to reflect her below the waist. She looked down intently at her legs, pulling the thin black silk stockings taut; she knew they were as nearly perfect in shape as legs could be. Then she slipped on her nightgown and blew out the candles.

Mrs Colhouse was a good cook, especially under Elinor's superintendence. The moment they heard the sound of Richard's footsteps on the path, the lake whitefish was put on the grill, the little round biscuits lay ready to place in the oven. The half-breed help looked on; she was never allowed to touch the food. Elinor had laid the table, had prepared the cucumber and tomato salad, which looked deliciously tempting in a dish shaped like a large green leaf. A glass vase full of Mrs Shuter's choicest rosebuds decorated the table, upon which lay a wooden bowl of baked potatoes, small glass saucers with delicately rolled pats of yellow butter snuggling crisply between their protecting lumps of ice, a little silver tray of salted almonds and one of chocolates. In front of each place was a half cantelupe, full of cracked ice.

A curtain made of light cane separated

the dining-room from the sitting-room into which Kurt was shown clumsily by the help. He wore white flannel trousers and a tie more vivid in colour mixture than Elinor had ever seen. The hideous combination of it fascinated her. She was very sensitive to colour, and she could not take her eyes off it as, parting the curtain, she came towards him. He must have noticed her stare, for directly after shaking hands with her he remarked: "I'm afraid you don't like my tie. It's only a sort of imitation of the Zingari, you know."

She didn't ask what Zingari were, but told him lunch was ready and took him into the other room. She sat down at once, but he stood beside her, waiting.

"What about Mrs Colhouse?"

"Mamma will come in presently. She insists on doing the cooking. We can't get cooks here and our old coloured cook's at Waterville." She watched his face, wondering how this humiliating avowal would affect him.

"I'm so sorry I'm giving her extra trouble. I wish I'd known. Can't I do something? I'm rather good at cooking. I began when I was a fag and polished it up in Canada."

Wondering what a fag was, Elinor made him sit down, assuring him that her mother would be upset if he took any notice. He praised everything; it all looked so appetising. And when she told him that she had had a hand in it, he expressed his admiration enthusiastically.

After the hired girl had brought the fish, Mrs Colhouse came in. Her face was flushed, and she glanced at Elinor apprehensively as Kurt rose and warmly greeted her, holding the chair for her and passing the sugar for her melon. But she wouldn't take any and it was only when Elinor pronounced the white-fish to be "lovely" that a look of relief came into her face. Things then went easily, and when Elinor, leaving the table and going out to the ice-chest, returned

with a large glass bowl of sliced peaches and ice-cream, which she informed him she had herself prepared, she read in his face gratifying admiration of her taste and skill. She began to think that his admittance to their modestly conducted household, far from shocking him, had established an additional claim on his consideration. There was a perceptible deepening of his general interest, a growing sympathy in his manner towards both her mother and herself. He seemed to her to be appreciating them the more for their making him so much at home. This was not in line with her experience; any other man she could think of, though delighted to enjoy her society under such intimate conditions, would have become familiar on the strength of them. When Mrs Colhouse helped the hired girl to clear the plates, he begged her to allow him to do his share. "You don't know how much pleasure it would give me. I ought to wait on you." Her mother's

answer "You'll get used to being waited on, time you've finished," was not at all the sort of answer she ought to have made and caused Elinor to take him into the other room and tell him that "Mamma would so much rather do it."

"I do like your mother" he said, "she's so kind; but she looks rather sad, doesn't she?"

Elinor was sitting in the low arm-chair, fanning herself; it was very hot. "I'm afraid she has reason for being sad." She sighed and put her fan before her eyes. This was a moment to take advantage of. "She's not happy with my father and we've lost all our money."

He sat down close to her at the end of the sofa. "I'm so sorry."

"We used to live in Baltimore. Father is a doctor and was quite well off then. When he lost his money, we went to Waterville; and things have got worse and worse. And I'm an expense to him, but he adores me; he'd give me every-

thing if he could. When I was a child I was brought up like a little princess. Now he's old and he's taken to speculating with the little that is left." She folded her fan and turned her face away.

"I'm so sorry." He laid his hand lightly upon hers as it lay in her lap. "I'm so sorry," he repeated.

"Oh, well, it can't be helped." She made a movement as though she were shaking off a spectre. "I'm sure I don't know why I should worry you with all that."

"Worry me! To think of my having talked to you about my affairs while all the time you were worried to death. To think of your being so good to me, giving me that delicious lunch and all that, when you're—you're——" He got up and walked to the window, then came back. "If only I had some money. That's what makes me so angry—the governor's got plenty."

Elinor laughed. "I don't see the connection "

"Why not? What's the good of money if one can't help one's friends?"

"But you hardly know us."

"I feel as if I'd known you for years. You know what I mean. Your mother seems like a dear old aunt." He had barely said the words when Mrs Colhouse appeared, followed by the help, carrying a tray of steaming hot, delicious-smelling coffee.

"I say, what a treat. I know you've been making that. How naughty of you. At home my eldest sister always does it, except when there are people."

"How many sisters have you, Mr Kurt?" Mrs Colhouse asked.

"Two. I wish you knew them and my mother." He paused and looked at Elinor. "Perhaps you will some day."

It was plain that he wanted them to know all about himself, and he told them a good deal that afternoon. Elinor knew her mother was puzzled by many of his

expressions and allusions ; so was she, for that matter, but they needn't expose their ignorance. They were all things that could be learnt without giving oneself away if one had sense.

CHAPTER II

i

DURING the next few days, Elinor had misgivings. It was surprising what a long period twenty-four hours could be when one was anxiously hoping and waiting for a particular thing to happen. Not that the time passed slowly; on the contrary, she grudged every hour which went by without bringing her nearer to her goal and asked herself whether she had made the best use of it, for it seemed to her that events were not taking the course they ought to take. Was there anything she had done or left undone which might have brought about a more favourable, a more pregnant and especially a more emotional situation? For, up till now, in spite of outward appearances which might impress onlookers at the hotel and

cottage residents, in spite of an entirely sympathetic manner towards her, Richard Kurt had made no declaration. And she got no support from her mother, who seemed to be unnaturally and unreasonably protecting him at her daughter's expense. It was as though her maternal instinct had been aroused by his artlessness and by what she imagined to be his defencelessness. He had spent each day with them; this was the third since the dance, and Elinor was to take supper with him at the hotel, whither he had now gone to dress. There had been a thunderstorm, which had kept them in all the afternoon. He was apparently quite as pleased when her mother was present as when she and he were alone together. She went so far as to express ironical wonder that her mother didn't come and chaperone her at supper.

"Yes," Mrs Colhouse tartly replied, "I guess he needs a mother more than he does a wife." At which Elinor went up to dress, determining, whatever happened,

she would manage without her mother's assistance.

He arrived punctually at eight as arranged, but when she came into the room he got up, hardly looking at her, and continued begging her mother to come with them. "I can't see why you don't come. Your dress? You always look nice. And what on earth do clothes matter at that rotten hotel?"

This was not agreeable for Elinor, who had put on a specially smart New-York-inspired dinner-dress.

On the way up he told her he didn't quite like taking her alone. Was it really all right? Wouldn't people talk?

"If you're afraid to be seen with me you'd better say so and not take me." She stood still as she uttered the words. She was losing patience with him.

"I say! You know I don't mean that. It's entirely for your sake; please don't be offended." His manner was appealing and she relented, but she was not really

appeased. It was galling that, unlike everyone else, he was unimpressed by her fashionable appearance. He seemed to take it for granted, for he only glanced at her now and then when he talked. On this occasion she knew she was at her best; everyone in the dining-room stared at them as they went to their table. He had stupidly chosen one in a corner, where she could least be seen. She couldn't resist commenting upon this with some asperity, and his "Less conspicuous. I thought you would prefer it" would have increased her irritation had not an imposing-looking man and a lady wearing a diamond necklace and diamond rings taken their seats at the next table. Kurt had his back to them, which was as well, for the man stared at her with marked admiration—in fact, kept his eyes on her nearly the whole time. He must be someone of importance, for towards the end of supper Hugh M'Alpin came over to their neighbours' table and shook hands with

them, asking when they arrived. M'Alpin was the most important man in Manitou, and only went out of his way for people who were worth while.

"We came up in my private cyar from Detroit. I'm on my annual grand tour of the system. There's a conference of the Inter-state Commission at Milwaukee and I'm goin' to get things straightened owt." He addressed himself to M'Alpin but his eyes were directed at Elinor. He now began conversing audibly with the lady beside him, mentioning their new "brown-stone front" at Cleveland and their cottage at Narragansett. As he rose from the table Kurt kept his back to their neighbours while he waited for Elinor to pass out.

They sat down in the lobby where hotel guests gathered after meals.

"You didn't see that man at the next table, did you?" she could not resist asking.

"I heard him; that was enough."

The subject of her question came out of

the dining-room and she saw that he was making a bee-line towards them. To her surprise, he held out his hand to Kurt, who rose slowly and apparently touched it with the tips of his fingers as the other asked him, with his eyes on her : " How air yew, young feller ? Where's yer uncle ? "

" In London. "

" Guess he'll sell the C. W. & M. Your folk can't make that system pay under the Inter-state regilations. Have a cigyar ? "

Kurt declined politely, but the other showed no intention of moving and still kept his eyes on her. " I gave yer uncle the combination but he warn't takin' any. He's too high-flown, he is, always talking about his shareholders. You've gat to learn shareholders what business is—that's what I tell him. " After laying down the law pretty thoroughly for some minutes as to what Mr Theophilus Kurt's railroad policy ought and ought not to be, during which time Richard Kurt stood silent, he suddenly turned to Elinor and asked her pointedly

whether she was staying at the hotel and how long for. Kurt interrupted: "Miss Colhouse is with her mother at their cottage, Mr Galton." His tone was icy but the other, with complete imperturbability, continued: "Is that so? I know a Dr Colhouse—tried to float a mining proposition at Chicawgo some time back." He looked knowingly at her, and there stood Kurt, with his eyes in front of him, not saying a word. The embarrassing moment was relieved by the appearance of the lady with the diamonds, to whom Mr Galton made a sign. As she came near them, he introduced her as his wife. Kurt offered his seat, bowed and moved away, much to Elinor's relief.

"Where did yer run into young Kurt? Seems to be badly stuck on himself." Mr Galton blew a cloud of cigar smoke into her face as he asked the question.

Elinor disliked cigar smoke, but she smiled ingratiatingly. She must manage him so that he didn't say anything to

the detriment of her father in front of Kurt.

“He’s English, so English, you know.” She mimicked the tag of the day playfully.

“That is so, and he’s full of money. Theophilus Kurt’s in the Alger firm and I guess this young dude’s got a big interest in their deals. Anyway the baron thinks a lot of his president; lets him run the show his own way.”

Elinor was meditating this information when Mrs Galton, whose eyes had been fixed on her while her husband spoke, remarked: “Perhaps Miss Colhouse knows more about the Kurts than yew do, James. Do yew know Mrs Kurt, Miss Colhouse?”

“No, Mrs Galton. I only met Mr Richard Kurt here this summer after his aunt had gone to England.”

The lady glanced meaningly at her husband and Elinor, disposed at this critical stage to be apprehensive, wondered what the glance implied. The diamonds might provide an opportunity to propitiate.

"What lovely jewels you have, Mrs Galton."

The older woman lovingly fingered the ornament on her breast and, looking at Elinor's array of poor little pins affixed as was the fashion to her bodice, answered: "They're all presents from Mr Galton, Miss Colhouse."

Was that bedizened hag insinuating something?

"I took that for granted, Mrs Galton," she said, smiling at the president with deliberate intent to charm. Even at the sacrifice of her own interests she could not resist the joy of an immediate score. On this occasion she succeeded so well that the glittering lady rose, tossing her head, and walked off.

Mr Galton manifested exuberant delight. "You got the old woman there; you're a pert chick. Say"—he put his mouth very close to Elinor's ear—"what about that English dude?" He drew back somewhat and waited for her answer.

"I don't think I quite understand." She meant her reply to show that she was taking his question in good part but she put an extra refinement into her tone.

"Anyone can see he's stuck on you. If I put in a word or two, will yew keep a little corner of your heart for me?"

"Why, what would you do with it, Mr Galton?"

His small blue eyes seemed to look her through. "I guess your old dad would be mighty pleased. He's pretty down on his luck, ain't he?"

She must appeal to his pity. "It's very hard on my mother and me, Mr Galton. Sometimes I wonder what will happen to us." She spoke very sadly. "Of course, Mr Kurt doesn't know all this."

"Why should he? You jest marry him and you'll be O.K. And if I ken do anything any time, why, let me know." He pulled a big pocket-book stuffed with

hundred-dollar bills out of his pocket and extracted a square card upon which were engraved in large letters :

JAMES W. GALTON,

President

CCC. & O. & Associated Railroads,

Cleveland.

“ Our home’s on Euclid but you write to the office and mark it ‘Private.’ You never ken tell——”

In the distance Richard Kurt was hovering uncertainly. The railroad president stalked across the hall and placed his hand on the young Englishman’s shoulders, talking as he had done to her, close to his ear.

Some minutes later, Kurt, blowing through his lips as though he wanted to blow away a disagreeable memory, threw himself into the chair beside her. “ What a man ! He told me your father was a great friend of his.” His tone implied that he couldn’t believe it.

She was rather puzzled as to what to say.

“My father, being a doctor, knows all sorts of people. He can’t always pick and choose his acquaintances and Mr Galton’s influential. He was very nice to me and told me to write to him if ever I wanted a friend.”

Kurt looked horrified.

“He told you that, did he? Well, all I can say is——” He didn’t finish the sentence; his expression of disgust spoke for him.

On their way down to the cottage he let fall a remark which she pondered later on when she went to bed and it kept her awake for a good time afterwards. “I can tell you this. I’d do anything rather than that you should fall into the hands of a man like that. His friendship! I’d rather you had his hate.” It had not the satisfactory precision of an avowal but it was the nearest thing to it. The question now was how far she could push her

advantage. Should she or should she not make further use of Mr Galton?

ii

The next morning Kurt did not turn up but sent a note, which began without the customary "Dear." Evidently he was not bold enough to address her as Elinor, which even in speaking he had never yet done. He had once told her he invented special names for people he liked, but so far he had not invented a special one for her.

"A line to say I shan't be coming to the cottage this afternoon. I've promised to play poker with some men here. But if I may I'll look in after supper.—R. K."

That was all and it wasn't encouraging. Her first impulse was to send a cold answer telling him not to trouble to come in the evening but she thought better of it and wrote instead:

"Shall expect you about nine. Hope you won't lose all your money."

Mrs Colhouse came into the room as she was handing her reply to the messenger. "He's not coming this afternoon, mammy; he's playing poker."

"Is that so? I guess they know they've got a jay, poor lad."

Elinor was wearing a rather soiled dressing-gown; her fringe was curled but not combed out, and she was feeling thoroughly irritable. She threw the note into the fireplace angrily and snapped out: "That's about as much as you care. You think more about him than you do of me. I hope they'll darned well skin him. He deserves——"

A loud knock interrupted her. It was repeated peremptorily.

"Get back to the kitchen and tell that good-for-nothing slut to open the door. I believe it's a visitor."

Elinor had hardly dashed out of the room and up the stairs when she heard the heavy footsteps of the impatient arrival. She stood on the landing listening.

“Guess I’m speaking to Mrs Colhouse. Glad to make your acquaintance. My name’s James W. Galton, President of the Three C’s. & O. Met your daughter last evening. She’s a mighty pretty girl.”

Elinor felt mad. There was her mother in that old alpaca blouse and an apron, and her hair all anyhow. She hurriedly combed out her fringe and threw on the dainty blue *négligé* to which her mother had, by her direction, put the finishing touches while she was at the hotel the evening before. Of course she found him sitting in the broken chair; equally of course, her mother was standing in front of him like a servant. “You’ve taken us by surprise, Mr Galton,” she said, in her best manner and with her most highly polished accent.

“Thought I’d come without making any shakes about it, seeing I know the old man.”

Mrs Colhouse looked startled, and at a sign from her daughter subsided into a chair, on the edge of which she sat stiffly, looking first at Elinor then at the visitor.

“Now I want you to look upon me as a friend of the family. I’ve got a proposal to make. I’ve got to git off to-morrow to Detroit. What do you say to coming in the cyar and bringing that young English feller with you. Yew can stay a day or two there. There’s fine stores”—he looked Elinor up and down admiringly—“and I’ll see you have passes and sleepers back. What do you say?” He addressed himself to Mrs Colhouse, whose face showed more and more surprise as she realised that his invitation included her.

“Thank you, Mr Galton, but I couldn’t go. Thank you very much.” She looked at her daughter with a frightened expression.

Elinor was thinking quickly. What was his object? It couldn’t be disinterested kindness. What ought she to do? Kurt would certainly not go and if she went without him she knew she would never see him again. And what use was Galton in comparison with the other?

“I’m afraid it’s impossible, Mr Galton.

My mother couldn't come, and of course I couldn't go without her."

He glanced at her doubtingly. "It's as you like," he said. "Folk sometimes like a trip, and I hoped your mother would come—as I know the doctor."

He got up and offered his hand to Mrs Colhouse.

"Glad to have made your acquaintance, ma'm. If there's anything I can do for you at any time, yew let me know. I've given my address to your daughter. Good-bye, Miss Colhouse, if you change your mind, you've only to come along with your young Englishman. We leave at nine-thirty."

Without more ado he strode out of the room and out of the house, slamming the door behind him.

Elinor knew that her mother was expecting at least a comment from her on the railroad president's abrupt arrival and departure, but she was in no mood to

gratify her. She was feeling generally sore without exactly knowing why, except that everything was going wrong through no fault of hers.

Mrs Colhouse sighed deeply and moved slowly to the dining-table end of the room.

That was mammy all over, off to act the martyr in the kitchen as usual, a sickening habit. Elinor called her back.

"Can't you wait a moment? You act as though you couldn't keep out of that kitchen."

Mrs Colhouse felt for the black ribbon under the collar of her blouse and pulled a watch out of her bodice.

Elinor watched her resentfully. "You can spare yourself trying to tell me the time without your spectacles. I know you're going to say you must get dinner ready. It so happens that there's cold meat and baked potatoes, so you don't have to."

Her mother did not reply but sighed again and returned the watch.

“Mammy——” Elinor intended her mother to know that she was exercising great self-restraint “how many times have I told you not to go to the door looking like that?”

“What was I to do? I hadn’t time to think, and the help was upstairs sweeping. Besides—he walked in anyway.”

“Yes, and if you’d have done as I’ve told you times over, you’d have been out of the road. But what’s the use of my trying to make a decent appearance?”

Elinor’s despairing gesture elicited another sigh.

“I believe the best thing I can do is to go to Detroit with Galton.” She hadn’t the slightest intention of doing so; she was only trying to goad her mother into an expression of disapproval. But she failed.

“After your New York doings, I don’t think it much matters what you do.”

“New York doings. What d’you mean?”

Mrs Colhouse drew in her breath instead of sighing and closed her mouth firmly.

Elinor intended to have it out. "I insist on your telling me. Who's been gassing about my business? Of course I know. Felton. Pshaw!" She gave vent to a bitter half laugh. "He's a fine one to talk against me." She threw herself angrily back in her chair.

"Did I ever say it was Felton Crane?" Mrs Colhouse asked in an irritatingly even voice.

"You know he's crazy with jealousy, he'd say anything. What did he say anyway? I'm determined to know, and you can't fool me. It's him right enough."

"I'm not going to say anything more, Nell, I had enough of it last time."

"You hadn't any business to talk to him then and you've less now. What right has he got sticking his nose into my affairs?"

"Have you treated him fair, Neli? Why don't you break it off with him? You don't want him, do you? He's no good anyway."

Elinor changed her tactics suddenly.

“What right have you got to say he’s no good? He’s a darned sight better than nothing.”

Her mother looked bewildered.

“What d’you mean anyhow? If you want him, why don’t you marry him?”

“You know perfectly well Felton hasn’t a cent. And, besides, I don’t mean to live in Waterville for the rest of my life I’d rather be dead—nor in America either—unless it’s New York.”

“I thought——” Mrs Colhouse this time spoke with a certain emphasis “you’d done with New York but as you’ve never told me anything——”

“What do you want me to tell? You know Hilyard can’t marry me yet. I’ve told you that and I’m not waiting on him. It’s Richard Kurt I’m thinking about.”

“But he hasn’t even come to-day. You can see that boy’s not thinking of marrying.”

For an instant Elinor faltered, but she

put confidence into her tone as she answered: "That's what you think. He's coming here this evening after supper. I want you to tell him about the president's asking me to go to Detroit."

"What good will that do?"

"Mammy! Can't you see Mr Galton's crazy to get hold of me. He only asked Kurt because he thinks he's a young sucker. You tell him that."

The look of resignation returned to Mrs Colhouse's face.

"I'll tell him, and if ever you marry him you'll be mighty lucky, I reckon."

iii

Elinor was well aware of the power of dress to enhance an appearance and she knew that no woman could make better use of it than she. In spite of Kurt's apparent indifference to her best effects, she simply couldn't believe that he was as unappreciative as he seemed to be. As likely as not it was only part of his

shyness, or it might very well be that in England it was not considered good style to make flattering personal remarks.

She had decided that on this occasion she was going to look pale and sad. She therefore used with discrimination the liquid powder, avoided lipsalve and selected a loose-fitting teagown of black *crêpe de Chine* which, if properly supported by the complexion and the coiffure, would lend her that air of wan dignity she had so often admired on the stage. And after all, was not life a stage and were we not all players?

Thinking thus, looking at her dress as it lay on the bed and bearing in mind that it might fall open while she reclined, as she had decided, on the sofa, she selected a diaphanous golden-coloured petticoat; she would wear no corset, only her gossamer chemise beneath. She had arranged the little sitting-room carefully before going up to dress, had moved the sofa against the wall with the green-shaded lamp

casting its effulgence upon the middle and end of it but throwing a subdued and agreeably melodramatic light upon the part where her head would lie. She had placed the better of the two arm-chairs beside it with its back to the green lamp, and had told her mother to sit in the broken-springed one on the other side of the fireplace. She had also brought out two special cushions, a black and gold and a crimson one, to place under her head and behind her back. The only other light was in the corner beside the door which would enable her to be seen as she came in but the high part of the sofa and the pillow would screen her head from it when she reclined.

She did not hurry over her dressing, leaving the finishing touches till he entered the house ; this was just as well, for it was nearly half-past nine when she heard footsteps outside. She had even begun to feel anxious and was relieved when his voice confirmed his arrival. Her entry

threatened to be a failure for so deeply interested did he seem to be in something her mother was saying that she had to stand some seconds in the doorway before he came towards her. Facing the light as he was she noticed that his hair was less smooth than usual and that he was flushed; his manner, too, was excited and wasn't he a trifle unsteady on his feet? Elinor was something of an expert in detecting such signs from a considerable experience of Dr Colhouse. As she sank languidly back on her cushions his face showed concern.

"I hope you aren't ill?" he asked.

"Only one of my nervous headaches, don't pay any attention to that. How did you come out from your game?"

"Never mind about that rotten game. Your mother's been telling me——" he looked round, evidently intending Mrs Colhouse to hear, but she had noiselessly left the room, "about that damned Galton." He spoke furiously.

This anger was exactly what she wanted. She put one arm beside her head and rested her lovely face on it, and with the other hand touched his arm lightly and soothingly. "Don't be so cross——" and then, very softly, "dear."

He jumped up with an excited flourish of his hand. "Cross! Don't you see what that blackguard is after? He thinks I'm an utter fool he can humbug as he pleases. What he wants is to—is to——"

She knew that he was unable to express with appropriate respect for her the president's evil designs. She closed her eyes an instant. "I'm not in a very happy position with no father to protect me; and mamma's so unsuspecting. Do you really think a man of Mr Galton's age and position would——"

"That scoundrel would do anything. He thinks because he's rich and he's got a rotten private car that he can do what he pleases. I know the sort of man he is! You don't. How should you? I

say——” he came over and stood looking down at her “promise me you’ll have nothing to do with him. He’s sure to try every dodge—and I may not even know——”

She put her hand on his arm and pressed it. “Sit down, Richard. May I call you that?”

He seized her hand and pressed it between both of his. “May you? I love it.” He raised her hand to his lips, holding it there.

She could feel the heat of his lips, an unnatural heat and as he just breathed a kiss upon her fingers she withdrew them slowly, touching his face as she did so. It was very hot. His eyes travelled down her figure, rose to her face again; they were very bright; the light from the corner of the door shone full on his face, he was breathing hard. Neither said a word, only looked into each other’s eyes. Her breast rose and fell without her volition. It was a tense moment but she must

preserve her detachment; that was vital. Suddenly he bent down and kissed her on the cheek.

“Richard! Richard!”

He drew back; she knew he was half frightened at his act.

“Please forgive me, Elinor.” Again he seized her hand, kissing it and murmuring: “I couldn’t help it, I really couldn’t. You look so lovely and you’re so defenceless and the thought of that blackguard——”

Elinor played a trump. She drew her hand away from his mouth and taking one of his, kissed it and held it to her breast. But he pulled it away, saying: “How can you kiss my hand? It’s yours, it’s yours I must kiss——” and brought hers passionately to his lips again. She half rose and with the other arm encircled his neck, and as she fell back she bore him with her, down and down. He buried his face in her breast, fell forward from his chair, his knee against the sofa, and ever she held his neck with her arm as

he ruffled her more with every movement. His lips were upon hers now, stayed there. His hand touched her breast, followed her form, withdrew in fear, dared again, remained. Elinor had not experienced this performance unmoved and when palpitating, unmanned, ashamed, he stood away, regarding her as though she had become his handiwork, with a seemly and self-protective instinct she covered her face with her hands.

“Elinor, dear Elinor——” his voice was muffled in sobbing gasps; he threw himself on his knees beside her, “I love you! I love you! You belong to me now, you belong to me, don’t you?”

Very slowly she removed her hands and gazed softly at him. At last, with all the tenderness she could put into her tone, she murmured, “Nothing matters from now on. I love you, Richard.”

He smothered her mouth with kisses. “Darling—darling—darling” was the only word he could find.

Now she gave herself up to him with complete self-abandonment. Her black *crêpe de Chine* could go to the devil for all she cared. Yes! and her Valenciennes-trimmed chemise too! What did anything matter now? He behaved desperately for several minutes, until, in fact, she was really beginning to feel the wear and tear. He ceased rather suddenly, and stood up, rocking a little.

Elinor was composing herself; her skill enabled her to accomplish such details as straightening her dress and arranging her hair without the absurd and grating awkwardness which must, she knew, generally be displayed on such occasions. Without having had an exactly similar experience previously, the episode was not entirely unfamiliar.

“Dearest——” he leant over her and kissed her “I’ll never do it again. I feel as big a beast as Galton. What can I do to make up for it?”

She had put her feet to the floor but

still reclined against the pretty cushions with an air of exhaustion; he was beside her now, holding her hand between both of his and looking at her anxiously. For a moment thus, then, with a quick impulsive movement, she sat up straight and put her other hand on the back of his and with quivering earnestness in her voice as she gazed intently into his eyes: "Only one thing, Richard. You must tell mamma at once we're engaged. I feel she'll suspect something, this house is a sounding board; one hears every word." She kept her eyes fixed on him, waiting for his answer. It was a critical moment.

For an instant he hesitated, as though he were making an effort to collect himself and to think; then he kissed her gently. "Engaged! We are engaged, aren't we? Of course I'll tell your mother at once. When? To-morrow? But—what will she say? Won't she think it rather sudden?"

"Mamma likes you so much she'll accept it at once. She may be a little surprised at first but I know it will make her happy. Come to-morrow morning. Now you'd better go." She got up, holding his arm. They moved out of the room together and he put his arms round her once more. The front door was open and they were in the full light of the hall lamp but what did that matter now?

"Once more, darling." Again he kissed her and as he went down the path she saw he was trying to walk backwards to see the last of her, but he was too unsteady and had to give it up.

Without an instant's delay, Elinor locked the door, put out the lights and ran up to her mother's room. Mrs Colhouse was sitting by a table with a lamp on it, sewing a trimming on to one of her daughter's blouses. She looked up with a surprised expression as Elinor entered and bestowed a resounding kiss on her mother's cheek.

“He’s asked me to marry him, mammy, and he’s going to announce our engagement to you to-morrow.”

Mrs Colhouse put down her work and took off her spectacles. “It’s going to be marriage this time then?”

Elinor was in too exalted a state to let anything annoy her. “It certainly is, and what’s more,—but never mind.” She had been about to add: “I intend to marry him the very first moment I can,” but she wasn’t taking any chances; her mother might blurt it out to him and that was the last thing she wanted.

“There’s many a slip, Nell. And what will his mother say?”

Elinor smiled. “If his mother don’t like it, she’ll have to lump it. It’s her funeral, not mine.”

iv

Elinor was under no illusions regarding her hold on Richard, but she was determined to lose no sleep over it and to

husband her physical as well as her moral resources. When, on awaking to consciousness after eight good hours of refreshing and invigorating sleep, she slipped out of bed and into the faded blue dressing-gown, that old and trusty friend reminded her rather unkindly of other mornings disappointing in the fulfilment of overnight pledges. But she kept a confident countenance to her mother who scrutinised her closely as they sat in the kitchen taking their morning coffee, and in spite of inward twitchings, Elinor put away a good round of griddle cakes and maple syrup, bestowing praise on her mother as she did so.

“Nobody’s cakes are like yours, mammy.”

Mrs Colhouse accepted the compliment joylessly. “What I want to know is what you want for dinner.”

“Lunch, you mean. Grilled chicken, green peas and little new sweet potatoes. I’ve got some bars of Caillard’s chocolate,

and if that creature will get the cream I'll make a *soufflé*."

Then she went into the other room and settled down in the rocking-chair to think. No one knew better what morning reactions could mean. She pictured Richard Kurt waking in his room at the hotel and asking himself what he had really done and said the previous evening. She knew but too well the slenderness of the thread by which she held him. Would the thread hold? Would he come that morning and tell her mother? How far would he believe he was committed? This separation was dangerous; one never knew what a man would do once he was out of your sight. But he wasn't a man, and he was English with English ideas about the helplessness of girls and honour. He'd gone pretty far, his passion had got hold of him, he was wild for her—last night. Even after he had told mammy she wouldn't have got him until they were safely married. But what

mattered was that he should come now.

With knit brows and thoughtful mien Elinor went up to her room to dress. This morning she meant to be fresh and flower-like. She came to the conclusion that she could not do better than wear the blue dimity, but she selected a different sash and she did her hair like Mrs Langtry with a coil in the nape of the neck.

CHAPTER III

i

It was a glorious day. Water and sky were blue as they sat under an awning, steaming up the Straits. Elinor was charmingly dressed in a tailor suit and a neat toque; he wore a well-cut blue serge suit and a blue tie with white spots: their small valises lay beside them. Everybody looked at them admiringly, so far all had gone well.

The trip was Elinor's arrangement. They were to join her friends the O'Haras at a place called St Mary's at the head of the Straits and spend a couple of days there. It was to be a little junket before he returned, as return he must, to his work, which seemed to be much on his mind now they were engaged. Dennis O'Hara was a journalist and had married Elinor's only

intimate friend, Julia Bendixon. She didn't tell her everything, but she told her as much as she wanted to tell, and in her own way.

Richard had been difficult at first, had asked for some unnecessary explanations and had shown needless concern about her being adequately chaperoned. He had also been apprehensive as to what Mrs Colhouse would think of their going off for two or three days in this unexpected way. It had been agreed that the engagement must be kept secret until Uncle Theo came back in September. He had always got on with Uncle Theo, and Aunt Kate was American. If he wrote to his father or mother they wouldn't understand and she couldn't imagine how angry they would be. That couldn't be thought of, but when Uncle Theo and Aunt Katie saw how sweet and charming and pretty she was, they'd write to his parents and put it all right. Meanwhile, he'd go back to Cliftonburg and work for her sake.

Elinor had let him talk but she kept her own counsel. The trip up the Straits was indispensable but it had not been easy to bring about. As late as the previous evening he had spoken seriously to her mother about their engagement and told her that he ought to go back to Cliftonburg at once. Even that very morning when he arrived at the cottage with his bag to take her to the boat, he had expressed his doubts again. "Really, do you think it's wise to go for this trip? I've a sort of feeling against it."

But here they were, safely on the boat, and for the moment at least he was in high spirits. His moods changed suddenly. At moments a preoccupied look came into his face and if she spoke to him, he started and replied absently, even coldly. She did not attempt to analyse her feelings towards him; his manner, his appearance, his voice were factors just as much as the material advantages she was certain to obtain if she married him. She was

shocked, though, at his off-hand, familiar way of treating inferiors. He spoke jestingly to the purser and even chaffed the coloured stewards in the dining-saloon so that they grinned all over their faces whenever he spoke to them. While he was thus carrying on, she ruminated. She would have to talk to him seriously before they got to St Mary's. How was she to begin? The one thing quite defined in her mind was that they must be married at once. She could count on the assistance of the O'Haras. Dennis was as cute as they make them, but she would infinitely prefer to run the show herself. Going up on deck, after the meal, she made some allusion to his behaviour at table, showing him she did not like it. He began by laughing it off but his face became grave when she said that it cheapened her. What did he think they would take her for? And he answered: "I'm awfully sorry if it annoyed you, dear. I get a sort of reckless mood sometimes. You see, all

this has been rather exciting, hasn't it?"

"I don't see why that should make you give a Barnum show."

He looked away from her into the distance and lighting a cigarette, threw the match over the side. "Oh, it's an in for a penny, in for a pound feeling. Perhaps you can't understand what I mean. You see, you haven't known me long." He seemed to be waiting for her to say something.

It might be a moment for sweetness, but she couldn't summon it. He ought to show more consideration for her.

"When a girl has given her life into a man's hands——" her face became earnest, her voice trembled "when she has given him all she has to give, she can't help caring about every word he says, everything he does."

As she said the words his expression changed. He threw away his cigarette

and, taking her gloved hand, held it between both of his browned ones.

“My dear little girl, I am so sorry. I had no intention on earth—I had no idea I was hurting you. What can I do? Tell me, what can I do?”

Elinor sighed and looked beyond him. The dark lashes drooped over her large brown eyes which slowly filled with tears. His words had touched her, for indeed she was at his mercy, at the mercy of the world—beautiful but alone. She drew a tiny perfumed handkerchief edged with Valenciennes from her pocket and passed it across her eyes. He continued to press her hand, begged her to forgive him, to tell him what he could do to comfort her.

“You are a man, Richard. You can’t understand what a girl feels at a time like this when everything, her whole life depends upon one man. What is to become of me if—if——”

“Dear little girl—darling—if what—if

what?" His utterance was spasmodic; he was certainly moved.

"Richard dear, supposing you go off and leave me now. Supposing, for one reason or another, for your mother's sake or because you think it wiser—with the best intentions—supposing you go off to England. Supposing I never see you again after we get back to Manitou. You leave me there with poor old mammy and you go. What could I do? What would become of me?"

"Elinor! My darling! I should be an utter blackguard to do such a thing. Surely you can't imagine it. We're engaged—nothing could make me go back on that. Besides—I love you. I want you for my own wife." He looked round; a burly negro was coiling a rope a few feet away. "I wish I could kiss you, darling," and he pressed her hand hard between his.

Elinor sighed again softly but deeply, she could not be comforted. Again she

looked away into the distance under the deep lashes ; again the far-away, sad look came into the deep brown eyes. And he sat mutely watching her.

“ Ah, Richard dear. Life is so hard for a girl who is alone. If only—if——” She pressed his hand. He must see she was too much under the influence of emotion to go on.

“ Yes? Yes? ”

She made an effort, swallowed the sob in her throat, mastered herself. “ If I belonged to you legally as—as,”—she looked round. The negro, seeing there was no fun to be got out of watching them, had disappeared “ as I do the other way, and if we could only be married, I wouldn’t mind anything. I’d wait years if necessary.” She had been supporting her head with her elbow on the taffrail as she gazed sadly into the lake but she turned suddenly towards him and placed both hands in his. “ Richard, can’t we get married—now—at once? Will you, Richard? ” She

looked intently into his face. His eyes were averted. A moment passed.

“Elinor dear, I want to do everything you wish. But if I marry you without my parents’ consent, the governor will cut me off. We can’t live on nothing, can we?”

“But they needn’t know. We’ll keep it secret from everyone but mamma. I should have to tell her—after—after what has taken place.”

He relaxed his hold on her hand and she withdrew it as he moved uneasily in his chair. “But, Elinor, I couldn’t marry without at least seeing my people and explaining.”

There was a ring of horror in her voice as she answered: “Then you *do* mean to go to England before we’re married. Oh, Richard, Richard——” She buried her face in her hands.

Greatly distressed, he tried to comfort her. “What can I do? What can I do?”

“How can — can you ask?” She

managed to bring the words out between her shaking sobs.

There ensued a longish pause, punctuated by the sound of her weeping, which she kept within close audibility.

At last he spoke. "Elinor, dear Elinor, it shall be as you wish, but——"

She continued to sob; her whole body was quivering.

"But," he went on, "if it comes out, if the governor hears of it, if he disowns me, you mustn't blame me. If you're ready to take the rough with the smooth and chance it, I am. Now" he put his hand gently on her shoulder "now, darling, do stop crying."

With a great effort, she stifled her sobs, raised her head, whispered "Dearest Richard, thank you, thank you, thank you"—and turning her back to him and the boat, she put her toque straight.

The O'Haras were awaiting them on the landing-stage with expectant curiosity ; in fact Dennis stared at Richard as though his globular blue eyes were about to pop out of his head. Elinor had never realised how badly he dressed ; his hard felt hat was the wrong shape, and his waistcoat, cut much too low, displayed an unbecoming amount of decorative shirt front. She glanced at Richard with apprehension ; the impression made on him by Dennis at this juncture might be of importance. He did not, however, seem to notice these defects, and when, after reciprocal introductions, Julia took her arm and they walked on to the hotel which was within a hundred yards or so of the quay, the two men appeared to "cotton" to each other. To Julia's "Say, Nell, you have been smart," Elinor replied by a warning look and a whispered "This isn't the time to gas, Juley." Juley responded with an

understanding wink and Elinor, turning round, made a remark to Richard in order to bring the two men level with them so that they could all walk together. She had no confidence in Dennis's discretion, and he might ask undesirable questions or make unsuitable remarks.

Richard luckily refused Dennis's invitation to a cocktail and went to his room while Elinor was accompanied to hers by Julia, who, as the door closed behind them, exclaimed: "My dear, I didn't know what to do about the rooms."

Elinor laid her toque carefully on the bed, which was a double one, and with an expression of shocked surprise asked her what she meant.

"How was I to guess, Nell? But anyway, is it going right?" There was a certain anxiety in her voice.

Elinor had already taken a hand mirror and some other small objects from the top of her valise and laid them on the toilet table and was taking a side view of herself.

She put the mirror down and turned round to her little eager friend, whose head only reached to her shoulder. "We're going to be married at once, Juley, and you and Dennis must help me. Will you?"

"Will we? You bet we will. But tell me quick, quick, what you want us to do."

Elinor put her hand to her forehead and thought a moment. "Could you get hold of Dennis?" she asked.

"Now, you mean, before we've talked?" Julia's tone was disappointed.

"Yes, dear, now. Every minute's of importance. Get him. I'll explain while he's coming.

"He's in the bar, I reckon. We'll send a bell boy.

Elinor opened her carefully packed valise. One side of it she left strapped as it was; that side was not wanted yet.

"Go on, Nell; do go on," Julia cried impatiently.

Elinor undid her sponge-bag and using

her tooth-brush as though it were a lecturer's wand, she pointed at the door. "Richard Kurt, son of William Kurt of London, nephew of Theophilus Kurt, President of the C.W. & M. Railway system. He's rich or will be—his father is and he's in the best society. I don't know who his mother was but she certainly belongs to the aristocracy. Without exactly letting on as to what she was, he gave me to understand that she's away up out there. They've got a London house and one in the country, horses, carriages and footmen, and all London goes to their house and——" Julia was hanging on her words breathlessly when Dennis entered the room, grinned at them both and, throwing himself on the bed, lay there with his hands under his head.

Elinor waved the tooth-brush at him. "Get off there with your dirty shoes."

"Dirty shoes," he repeated, bending his legs back and examining first one, then the other. "They're brand new patent,

four dollars and fifty cents second-hand at Ikey Moss's in your own fashionable boulevard. You're a peach Nell, a real peach." He jumped off the bed, and going up to Elinor, kissed her on the neck.

She pulled away from him.

"Juley, do make him behave. This is no time for fooling."

"No, be serious, Dennis; Nell wants you to do something for her."

"Dennis" Elinor put her hand on his shoulder, at which he wriggled as though she were tickling him, winked and put out his tongue. "Dennis," she repeated, paying no attention, "we want to be married at once. Will you help me?"

"That depends." The sprightly young Irishman disengaged himself and put his hands in his pockets. "If you want a sample, I'm your lad."

"Sample, what does he mean?" Elinor asked Julia despairingly.

"I mean, if you want to take a chance

with me first——," he looked meaningly at the bed.

"Oh, dry up, Dennis, can't you see she's in earnest?" Juley's tone made an impression; his face changed and he waited.

"Dennis, will you go, now — before supper—and find out where we can get married to-morrow and what's got to be done? In fact, will you play brother and see me through?"

Elinor again put her hand on his shoulder, her voice was full of emotion. She was in earnest now; his help might be indispensable and she put all the dramatic quality she could command into her expression. For a second the Irishman looked at her admiringly without speaking. Of a sudden he threw his arms round her and, placing his hands below the small of her back, pressed her close to him, released her and seized his hat. "I will," he said, and bolted out of the room. Elinor turned sharply to her friend.

“Watch him out,” she exclaimed; “see he don’t meet Kurt—quick.”

The little woman swiftly followed her husband down the passage and Elinor went on with her toilet.

She found Richard downstairs waiting for her. She noticed that, like herself, he had the knack of making a new appearance by the substitution of one or two details of dress for others. Some people did not attach importance to such matters; she did.

“I like that Irish chap, he’s an awfully good sort.”

“Yes, they are real friends of mine. What I like about them is their loyalty; they’d do anything for me.”

“She is tiny, isn’t she? She’s got a funny little face, almost ugly, but she’s so sharp that it doesn’t matter.”

As he spoke Dennis and Julia appeared in the distance, the former waving a paper. Luckily Richard had his back to them, and Elinor, interposing herself skilfully, seized it from his hand.

"Not a word now, Den," she whispered, holding her finger to her mouth.

The Irishman threw himself into a chair beside Richard. "I've got a thirst I wouldn't sell. By St Patrick, what I've done this evening's worth a bottle of wine." To which hint Richard responded by ordering a bottle of champagne to be put on ice as soon as they took their seats at the supper-table.

Pleased though Elinor was at Richard's ready liberality, she glanced apprehensively at Julia. If Dennis's tongue became much looser he might utter some indiscretion that would wreck everything even at this eleventh hour. It was nervous work getting through the meal; she had to listen to every word, be constantly alert, ready at the first sign of danger to take whatever measure was necessary. There were moments of menace. When Dennis lifted his glass and drank "success to crime including the sacrament of marriage," she shot an ap-

prehensive glance at Richard. He was talking very little, his glass stood beside his plate almost untouched. He had ordered coffee and liqueurs to be brought to the table, Dennis had quieted down and conversation was languishing. But hardly had the Irishman tossed off his glass of brandy than he leant across the table and seizing Richard's, swallowed that as well. Banging down the empty glass with such force as to smash the base of it, he pointed his finger at Richard and remarked: "Not to-night, my lad. Brandy is a highly exciting stimulant suitable at this time of night for married men only"—with a huge wink at Elinor, "you might get loose and do some damage before the curtain goes up, and I'm here to see all's square till the knot's tied to-morrow. Isn't that so, Nell?"

There was an awkward pause. Elinor's eyes were on Richard, what could he think now? Could his innocence survive the shock of this last performance? She

cursed herself for bringing Dennis into her counsels, she had been crazy to do it. And yet from Richard's appearance he might even not have heard. There was only one thing to do. Signing to him, she rose from the table and they walked out of the room together.

iii

"I am so sorry Dennis behaved like that," she laid her hand on his arm; they were standing near the entrance to the hotel, the door open to the evening air.

"I really didn't catch what he said, I was rather absent-minded at supper, I'm afraid. I've been thinking, there's something I must say to you; let's go out into the fresh air."

Fear laid its cold hand on Elinor's heart. His voice sounded distant, as she had not yet heard it. What was he going to say? Whatever it was, his mind was made up. She knew that intuitively, the boyish look had died out of his face, his mouth was

tightly closed. Yes, his mind was made up, she would never be able to change it now. But to what? Somewhere between her breast and her stomach she felt a spasm which was physical anguish, the anguish of suspense. She tried to choke the horrid sensation down.

They strolled slowly by the side of the channel. Its waters raced here into rapids, across which a light suspension bridge swung its fragile length to the Canadian shore opposite. Richard guided her to it. Half-way across he stopped and let her arm fall, turning as he did so and gazing over the parapet at the turbulent stream below. It was a clear moonlight night and very still. His face looked deadly pale, was that only the effect of the moonrays? His silence, as he stood there, leaning over the bridge, looking at the water, frightened her. What was he thinking? What was he going to say? Suddenly he turned round again and faced her. He seemed to be making an

effort to master himself, to fight something down. For yet more instants he kept his eyes on her without speaking. She felt herself shrinking from his eyes. If only the moon weren't so bright!

"Elinor, you are going to be my wife, that is settled. I have given you my word, there can be no going back on it. But I tell you straight, I must tell you, that I know it is an awful mistake." He paused. Did he expect her to speak? No, for when she began to try and stammer something, he held up his hand. "If I can get someone to marry us tomorrow, I shall do so. I know I'm too young to marry, I'm not ready for it. I want to say this to you now so that in the future, if you regret it, I can never feel I didn't warn you. But I'm going to do my best and I shall stand by you through thick and thin if you back me up. I hope all will come right in the end. We shall have to separate at once afterwards, of course. If my people knew

I had got married like this without a word to them, they'd never forgive me. We may have to live apart for some time. I may even have to go to England without you. But I'll stick to you as long as you stick to me." Again he paused. Ought she to speak? "That's about all, I think, except—I'd like to marry you under the British flag." He pointed to the far shore. "It's only over there, and—I should feel I was doing the right thing if we were married in church. I'm—I'm not religious, you know, but it's the decent thing, I've been brought up to it and I don't trust the American marriage laws. I mean you to be my wife properly. I've finished now."

He turned round and leant over the bridge again.

That helped her, the scrutiny of his eyes was unbearable. While he looked at her she could not think, she could not even realise her immense, her overwhelming relief. He was going to marry her as soon

as he could, of his own accord, without her even having to press him. What had made him change like that? She was safe, everything was all right now, to-morrow or the next day she would be his wife, Mrs Richard Kurt, daughter-in-law of his father and mother in London. She must say something now, how was she to put it? He turned towards her again and this time he put his arm round her, and she, throwing back her head under the moon, lifted her face towards his, lifted her lovely face with its perfect shaped nose, with its great moist eyes under their heavy lids, with its lips parted to show the glistening teeth, with its lips parted, inviting his——. But his did not meet them. Instead he bent his head and kissed her just above her eyebrow, as a brother might. Had he no sense of romance? She had risen to the occasion so beautifully.

He offered her his arm quietly. “Now I think we’d better go back as I want that Irish chap to help me see to things.”

Elinor brought him to a halt.

“Richard, will you do me a favour? Please don’t ask the O’Haras to help you. Make the arrangements yourself. You don’t need him and—I’d much rather they weren’t mixed up in our affairs any more than they have to be. You see——” she noticed that he was looking curiously at her, “the only point was that they were here and could chaperone me. I should have preferred our being alone, much preferred it.”

“But they are great friends of yours?”

What was that odd undertone in his voice? “Perhaps I’ve made you think they’re greater friends than they really are.”

“But you trust them, don’t you?”

“Yes, I trust them, of course.” How was she to get out of this creditably? “Richard!” she put her hand on his arm and looked into his face “this surely is our affair, I feel I want *you* to do it *all*, it will make me happier——.”

“But you’ll let them come and see the knot tied, won’t you?”

Why did he use that expression of Dennis’s? Had he heard? Was he deeper than she supposed? And if he was, if he knew or suspected, how could he be ready to marry her just the same? Anyway it was settled, she had nothing to fear. There was nothing to lose her self-possession about.

“Yes, of course, they can come. But Dennis sometimes says such—such vulgar things, and this evening I feel I can’t bear any more; it’s all a great strain on me. I can hardly realise even now that this may be my last evening as a girl. You understand, dear, don’t you?”

He answered gently: “Yes, I understand. Of course it shall be as you like. You might tell me, though, what it is exactly you want me to do.”

Why did his eyes sometimes make her feel so uncomfortable? She withdrew her own as she answered:

"I should like you to leave me with Julia and go off to bed. If there's anything Dennis can tell me about the—the formalities—I'll send word to you. If not, we can start in the morning early and find out."

He listened gravely and attentively. "I will do as you wish."

Once more he offered her his arm.

iv

To Elinor's disgust, as they entered the hotel, Dennis was holding forth to two men, who were roaring with laughter at something he was telling them. As soon as she and Richard came into view, all of them stopped laughing and stared. Apparently Richard had not noticed them and she guided him to the opposite end of the vestibule where Julia was sitting.

The little woman held up her finger. "Oh, you two! I've been looking all around the hotel for you."

Elinor cut her short. "Richard is tired and is going to bed."

Julia gazed at him through her pince-nez, with a disappointed expression. "I mustn't ask any questions, must I? But I do so want to know what you've decided. I love my Nell, Mr Kurt."

"We're going to be married to-morrow if I can arrange it," he answered, in a low tone.

"Oh, I am glad. You're a lovely couple—and these runaway marriages are so romantic——."

Richard's expression changed. "We want to be married quietly, that's all. And it must be kept secret till I've had time to tell my family."

Mrs O'Hara grinned sympathetically and joyously. "Of course it must. We know that—don't we, Nell?"

Bidding them both good-night, he walked through the hall to the stairs, looking straight before him.

The sight of O'Hara had revived

Elinor's anger. "I never could have thought Den would have behaved so mean. It's not his fault if I'm not let down. Only a man as much in love as Richard would put up with such talk as he gave us this evening."

Julia looked distressed. "He don't mean anything by it," she remarked, in a soothing tone.

"Don't mean anything! He as good as told my fiancé I'd engaged him to rig up my marriage—with his disgusting expressions about 'seeing things square' and 'getting the knot tied.'" Elinor flashed her eyes at her friend, who recoiled under the withering scorn of her voice. "A fat lot of good he's been to me. Look at him now. I'll bet he's giving us away to those loathsome drummers he's tagged on to. D'you realise what I've been through all this time, what I'm going through now?"

Julia cast despairing eyes at her husband. "What ken I do, Nell?" she asked.

"Go over there and tell that blabgut of

a husband of yours to quit the trash he's with and come upstairs with you." Elinor marched furiously off and up the stairs to her room.

Five minutes later there was a knock on her door. Julia entered the room, followed by her husband.

"Say, Nell," Dennis went forward and stood in front of Elinor, "don't be so mad. There's no harm done."

"No harm done! How do you know? Instead of being a help, you've done all you could to down me. Nice friend you are." She burst into tears and little Julia ran to her and put her arms round her waist.

"You've acted the fool, Den, you always do when you're full," she cried, kissing Elinor on the neck, which was as high as she could reach.

O'Hara sat down on the bed, blew his nose loudly, folded his arms and stared at them with a blank expression. "When you two have finished, I'll begin."

Elinor continued to sob and Julia to console, without noticing him.

“What have I done anyway? Nell telephones she and her beau are coming to St Mary’s and wants us to stay over. We were going away but we waited to please her. She sends me to find out how she’s to get married. As soon as I get back with the information she behaves as though she or both of us were crazy. We have supper, she and her young duck disappear. The next thing I’m told is that I’m a doggorned fool and a blabgut and that I’ve given the show away.”

Elinor was still inconsolable and Julia got her into a chair and stood beside her. “Why don’t you tell her what you’ve done, Dennis, instead of sitting there talking. Where’s the paper?”

“How do I know she wants it? What do I know about anything?”

The words were said in a mock despairing tone but his expression showed that

he wanted to put matters right. He took a folded paper out of his pocket and spread it out on the bed.

"Come, Nell, dear. Do look at it," Julia urged coaxingly.

Holding her handkerchief to her face, Elinor moved slowly to the bed-side. It was a printed form which stated that, in lieu of banns, the marriage of the persons named thereon, for which blank spaces were provided, could be duly and legally solemnised in St Luke's Church, St Mary's, District of Algoma, by the incumbent of that benefice, on payment of seven dollars and twenty-five cents, plus a five-dollar stamp for the special licence.

This was, after all, exactly the information she wanted, and she could forgive him now.

"He likes you, Den." She spoke a little tearfully still. "He was going to ask you to help him, but I had to talk it over with you first. He wants to marry me at the earliest possible moment."

Dennis jumped up, put his arm round her neck and kissed her. "Give me a kiss, Nell, I've always told you you were a peach." He kissed her again. "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other but, as I was going to say, there's a mouse of a cleric who's making good money out of running his church as a registry office. All your boy's got to do is to go to the parsonage, pay that twelve dollars and fix the time for the ceremony."

The road was clear but she must still be careful. "Dennis, you'll say nothing to him about all this?"

"For sure I won't."

"If he should ask you, say you know someone who got married there. There's no call to say more. Now, will you get me some paper and envelopes?"

He left the room.

"It's all right now, Juley, but it mightn't have been. I want to have a talk when you've got Dennis to bed."

"That won't be before the bar's closed."

He came back with the paper and envelopes and Elinor was left alone. She sat on the bed and using the back of her hand-mirror for a writing-pad started a note.

"Richard my dearest."

She stopped and sucked her pencil. Couldn't she improve on that? She began on another sheet.

"Richard my husband-to-be."

That was better! But was it, though? She wrote one after another:

"My own Richard."

"My dearest Richard."

"Richard my dearest."

"Richard my husband-to-be."

"Richard my dear one."

"Richard my beloved."

Each had its special significance. She read them over, considering carefully. Now she'd got it!

"Richard, my all but husband." That was at once original, appealing and true.

“Richard my all but Husband,—It can, it shall be, as you wish. We will be married under the British flag and in a British church. I know nothing about your marriage laws but I trust you utterly. Dennis knows of a dear little church on the other side; it’s called St Luke’s, some friends of his were married there. There is no difficulty, only a small fee to pay. I shall be waiting for you, ready dressed, at eight. Knock at my door and we’ll go down together.

*“I can’t write what I feel, my heart is too full. I am thinking, thinking of all you mean to me, of our future. You know how deep my love for you is; I’ve proved that. I pray to God I may make you as good a wife as you deserve. Your
Elinor.”*

She read it over. It was wonderful how naturally the words came when one was deeply moved. She put the note in

its envelope, addressed it and laid it on the dressing-table. It was only half-past ten and Julia would be there in a few minutes, the bars closed early in Wisconsin. She began undressing, thinking hard. There would be plenty to talk over with Julia ; she was pretty cute. She laid her skirt and blouse carefully on a chair and took down her hair. It wasn't very long but it was thick, and black as jet. She combed it out and twisted it, holding it beside her face. She had much rather have been fair but how her hair showed up her skin and the natural colour in her cheeks ; her skin was as smooth as velvet, the colour of rich cream. She sat down and examined herself with the hand mirror. Her nose certainly was beautiful, so were her ears, like little shells close against her head. It was a pity her hair was so stiff, it was difficult to get it to go properly in the nape of the neck, those short hairs were so tiresome and straight, and curling them made them worse. She laid the

mirror down, undid her corset, threw it on the bed, sat in her chemise only and took the mirror in her hand again. The line of her neck and shoulders was perfect. She let her chemise drop and slipped on her lacy nightdress, open low in front, with blue ribbons to fasten it, which she tied with quick skill into impeccable bows, flattening out the ends.

There was a knock at the door.

Elinor slipped into bed as Julia entered the room.

“I’ve just put Den to bed. He’s as full as he ever can be.”

“Juley, I’ve been doing some thinking, and I want you to listen and talk to Den to-morrow when he’s sober. First, though, take this note to Richard’s room and hand it to him with my love. Say there’s no answer.”

Julia sped off and in a moment was back.

“He hadn’t started to undress. He was writing. I saw the paper covered with writing ; stacks of it.”

“Um, I wonder who he’s writing to.”

“Why? D’you think it matters?”

Elinor was pondering. “Don’t know that it does much—really. But, Juley, you know pretty well now how things are, don’t you?”

“In a way I do, but not exactly.”

“Well, listen. He specially doesn’t want the marriage known; he’s scared of his parents. Seems he and his father don’t get on any too well. But it’s his mother he thinks about chiefly.”

Julia gazed at her through her glasses with an alert expression in her bright eyes. “What is he going to do?”

“He says he’ll go straight back to his work at Cliftonburg and act as though nothing had happened till his uncle comes back; seems he’s good friends with his uncle.”

“What then?”

“Then he’d tell his uncle he’s engaged. He wouldn’t dare say married. After

that he didn't seem to know what would happen——."

"Why, Nell," Julia jumped up and stood in front of the bed with clasped hands, "that won't do. You might go on for years like that. Now look ahere. You get married and leave the rest to Dennis and me."

"Leave what rest? Why don't you say?"

Julia sat down on the bed again and put her hand affectionately on Elinor's arm under the short lace-trimmed sleeve.

"'Cos I'm wanting to save you knowing anything. That marriage can't be kept secret, that's all there is about it."

Elinor interrupted. "Juley! It's the one thing he wants."

"Can't help that. We've got to think of you."

"But I've promised. I said I could trust you and Dennis."

"Well, an' I guess you can. See here, Nell, you just go on promising, that don't

cost anything. He'll be as pleased as you will before he's done, anyway. And if you was to do as he wants, you'd likely find yourself left so badly that you'd—— But it's no use talking about it. What I want to know is, has he got a roll to go on with?"

"I don't know what he's got, not much anyway. But that don't matter. The old man can raise a few hundred dollars to get us to London."

"That's talking. You'll fix the old folk when you get there. Trust you for that. Say, Nell, what's he doing now?"

"Got some job on his uncle's railroad in Cliftonburg, about a hundred dollars a month, I guess, from what he said. He says he can easily get two hundred in a short while. His father wants him to work. Later on he's got to go into his father's business, banking, in London. Juley, they're rolling in money, millions of it." Julia's eyes glistened responsively. "And he's been in Canada with Sir William

Leicester Kartwright. He married Isolde Allones, who's in *Town Topics* every week. Sir William Kartwright's one of the way ups in London. Seems he and Richard's father formed a big company for farming and ranching in Canada and Richard was out there as his private secretary. The concern went wrong but it doesn't worry his father, though he must have lost stacks in it. Richard's uncle's a partner with a baron who's another big banker, and they own the C. W. & M. Railway system. I tell you, Juley, Richard Kurt's away up in G. I'll take chances about what he's got now. There'll be plenty of good English money and everything else later on."

By this time Elinor had worked both herself and her friend up to an exhilarating state of excitement, and Julia bent over her and kissed her with enthusiasm.

"Good for you, Nell," she exclaimed,

“now, I’ll get back to Den. When’s the wedding to be?”

“He’s to call for me here at my room at eight. We’ll have breakfast and go to the church straight away. You wait here till we come back.”

“Right, Nell.” She kissed her good-night. “Sweet dreams, my dear, and don’t worry.”

v

When Richard knocked on Elinor’s door at the appointed hour next morning, he had thrown off his seriousness of the night before and appeared to be in buoyant spirits. She was not quite sure that she altogether liked his new mood. She had prepared herself to be grave if not solemn as the momentous hour approached. She even alluded to her sense of its gravity at breakfast, for which he had, to her mind, an unreasonable appetite and took longer over than

in the circumstances was altogether becoming.

On their way across the suspension bridge he stopped at the spot where the scene of the previous evening had taken place, hung over the parapet and, looking at the water, said: "I must shoot those rapids this afternoon." Imagine thinking of such a thing when one was going to be married in perhaps an hour!

They had seen the minister get up from his breakfast through the open window as they approached the house. They were ushered into the parlour by an elderly woman, whose back was no sooner turned than Richard made allusions to her false hair. His behaviour was worse when the clergyman entered the room in a dignified manner, holding a prayer-book. Opening it at the page where lay a fringed canvas marker embroidered with a cross, the minister took out a card, at which Richard barely

glanced before passing it to her. While she was reading the inscription

THE REV. C. HAWKE,
Incumbent,
ST LUKE'S VICARAGE,
ST MARY'S,
ONTARIO

she heard him say: "I expect you know we've come to get married. How soon can we get it over and how much does it cost?"

Elinor considered such a way of introducing the object of their visit most undignified, even vulgar, and she was surprised that the minister smiled so pleasantly while he opened the prayer-book near the cover and took out another and larger card. This one Richard examined carefully. "That's all right," he said, drawing a bundle of notes from his pocket and counting them

on to the top of the prayer-book. "Five, ten, twenty. Let's see, how much was it, including the stamp?" He pulled the card out of his pocket. "Ah, I see. We'll call it a round twenty, shall we?"

Mr Hawke continued to smile. "Very kind, I'm sure, Mr —. What did I understand to be your name?"

"Richard Kurt and this is Miss Elinor Colhouse. We might as well fill in the forms now, if it's all the same to you."

Mr Hawke rubbed his hands softly. "I can marry you now if you like; the church is quite close. Would you like me to see to it at once?"

"Yes, Mr Hawke, I should."

"Excuse me then, a moment."

He left the door ajar. Elinor closed it and turned to Richard. She was feeling very sore. "I don't know why you have adopted this attitude."

"What attitude?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean. I think it's very unkind. No girl likes a

joke made of her marriage. And your way of acting and talking is worse than a joke. You seem to want to hurt my feelings."

Just then Mr Hawke returned with some papers, a pen and an inkpot in his hands. Elinor passed her handkerchief over her eyes and at the clergyman's invitation seated herself at the table beside Richard to fill out the forms spread before them. Once more Mr Hawke returned to the prayer-book, took out a third card, of much smaller size, and remarked to Elinor, with a benignant look: "Marriage lines, the most important of all for you, young lady, but I can't part with it yet—not yet—but very soon." He turned to Richard. "We can proceed now if you like."

The lady who had shown them in was awaiting them at the front door and was now introduced as Mrs Hawke. "What a lovely day. Blessed is the bride that the sun shines on." Her smile was full of

admiration and Elinor began to feel on better terms with herself.

Richard and the clergyman were walking in front, but they turned round and waited for the ladies to come up.

"I say, Elinor, Mr Hawke was speaking about witnesses and the O'Haras came into my head. I'd forgotten them. I'll run and fetch them."

She hesitated a moment. It would be a mistake to offend Dennis and Julia, but she wasn't going to let Richard go without her, she had heard of brides being left at the church before now.

"I'll go with you; they'll like it better if I ask them myself."

On their way to the hotel she determined to get an explanation of his constant changes of mood, and obtained an admission that he had been "rather bad form." "But," he added, "I know that little humbug makes a living out of this game. You ask O'Hara."

She looked sharply up at him. What

did he know? His face betrayed nothing; he was impenetrable sometimes.

They found the O'Haras awaiting them.

The clergyman, accompanied by Mrs Hawke, bustled out of the vestry in his surplice. "I'm quite ready. Would your friend like to act as best man?"

O'Hara nodded.

"Please give him the ring, Mr Kurt."

"The ring. By Jove, I never thought of that!" Richard looked helplessly at Elinor, who was thinking what a fool she had been not to have reminded him of the necessary symbol.

Dennis came to the rescue.

"I guess that's happened before now, hasn't it, your Reverence?"

Mr Hawke fumbled under his much-crumpled surplice and drew out a silver ring with an expression in his face like little Jack Horner pulling out the plum. Dennis examined it solemnly.

The ceremony over and the register signed, Elinor's vigilant eye observed Mr Hawke take Dennis and Julia aside. She beckoned to the latter, who whispered: "They're bargaining about the ring. He asked five dollars and Den says it's worth fifty cents."

Richard had overheard. Slipping across the vestry he put some notes in the clergyman's hand: "I beg you to accept ten dollars, Mr Hawke. The ring will be a souvenir of the greatest event of my life and I shall always keep and cherish it."

Elinor's heart leaped. There was a gentleman indeed, a real English gentleman; she took his hand and pressed it silently.

The Hawkes saw the four of them out by the vestry door.

Elinor was in front, with her arm in Richard's. "Let them pass," she whispered. There was so much she wanted to say, but she found no suitable words. She was

actually married to the boy beside her, he was hers now by right. What ought to be her next step?

They had almost reached the other end of the bridge when he broke in upon her thoughts.

“I say, Elinor, I must shoot those rapids after lunch.”

She tried not to show she was put about but he certainly was unaccountable.

He seemed to take it for granted that she should go up to her room alone and she was obliged to leave him while Julia accompanied her upstairs. She would have loved to unburden herself to her friend who plied her with questions as to what he had said and done, but how could she admit to her that he had literally said nothing, had never offered even to kiss her and that the one thing he wanted to do was to shoot the rapids.

“Wasn’t he sweet, Juley?”

“Sweet. Anyone can see how happy

he is. You are lucky, Nell dear." Julia kissed her warmly.

This was balm to Elinor.

The preliminary cocktails gave the ensuing meal a good send-off. Dennis behaved with reasonable decorum and to Elinor's relief no allusions were made to the morning's ceremony. Richard's spirits were maintained but his manner towards Julia and herself was identical. He was being pleasant all round.

When they rose from the table, he drew her to the corner of the hall. "I've looked up the boats. We must get off to-morrow at nine."

She assented, but there was more to come.

"It isn't possible to go on here like this. You mustn't be compromised. I must get you safe to Manitou with your mother and then go back to Cliftonburg."

She nodded.

"I'm so glad you think so; everything depends now upon keeping it dark. I wrote a long letter to my mother last night, but I thought better of it. Letters are no good. I shall have to face it out when the time comes. But there's no hurry, is there?"

"No, there's no hurry," she answered mechanically.

"Your agreeing with me makes everything easier. Now, let's go and shoot the rapids."

vi

It was quite exciting rushing through the boiling water. Jagged rocks, alternately exposed and overwhelmed, marked the narrow channel through which their canoe must pass. The two Indians standing, one at the bow, the other at the stern, uttered loud shouts, and as an additional thrill the paddler in the stern, with great dexterity, dashed about a glassful of water over Richard's back. That was all. They

shot into the calmer current and came smoothly to shore a mile lower down.

Richard paid the men laughingly, and said to her: "That's done; rather jolly, wasn't it?"

Further on, they took an ordinary rowing-boat and he rowed slowly into a backwater full of rushes. Here and there the water was almost stagnant and covered with water-lilies. Letting the boat glide to the bank, where it came to rest, he shipped his oars and sat down by her in the stern. At last! He put his arm behind her and drew her towards him, kissing her on the cheek as he did so. She yielded herself freely to him, moving her face so that their lips met, and held his in a long kiss. Then he sat back in the seat, withdrew his arm and lighted a cigarette. For a moment his expression was troubled, he inhaled several mouthfuls of smoke, then began:

"There's a lot I want to say, Elinor."

"Yes, dear." She put all the expressive-

ness she could into her voice. She wanted him to talk.

"We're man and wife now. I don't think I quite know how it has come to that, somehow."

The remark was not flattering, was not at all what she would have liked him to say but she would not show that and she made no comment.

"But there it is and I think, when we are able to be married properly so that everyone can know it, it will be all right. As it is, you see, really, it's not a marriage at all"—he looked at her again—"not in the proper way, I mean."

What was he driving at? What did his words imply?

"Of course it's private, if you mean that," she answered.

"No, I don't mean only that. I mean we can't live together at all, we mustn't. It would be utterly wrong considering—considering the circumstances."

She recognised the lameness of his con-

clusion and she began to see light. He was conveying to her that he would not claim his rights as a husband. If he felt so, there was nothing for her to do ; this lack of ardour was humiliating but he would soon change when they came together again. Meanwhile she must put something into his head it was important he should keep there.

She took his hand and held it between hers.

“I understand how you feel, dear. I’m sure you’re right. But the thought of our separation is very hard to bear, especially when I remember what we have been to each other.”

He threw his cigarette into the water and watched it soak and gradually sink before he answered.

“That was a mad moment, Elinor. I don’t forget it but I’m ashamed of it. It was all against my ideas. A man must respect his—— I’d rather not talk about it. But it’s no use making matters worse, is it?”

What exactly did he mean by making matters worse? What should she say? It was indispensable that he should realise the sacrifice she had made, his obligation to her.

"I don't know what you mean by making matters worse. I regret nothing as I know you love me. If you didn't, I shouldn't care to live" into her voice came the note of pathos "there would be nothing to live for." She ended with a sigh, looking not at him but into the water.

"Elinor—dear. Don't talk like that. Of course I love you." He put his arms about her and kissed her on the neck, the face, the lips.

She sighed again softly. "I hope so, Richard. All our future depends on that. 'Man's love is like a restless wave, ever at rise and fall; the only love a woman craves, it must be all in all.'" She quoted the words of her favourite song which always moved her. And Richard showed that the apposite quotation was effective,

so effective that it provoked renewed physical illustration of the enduring power of his love. The shadows lengthened on the water and they turned towards the shore when the mosquitoes became disagreeably inquisitive.

Elinor's memories of the evening that followed were not amongst those she ever wanted to preserve. Dennis O'Hara's silly jokes offended her sense of the appropriate and smeared what would otherwise have been romantic and poignant hours with commonness. She bore his behaviour as well as she could, encouraging Richard to talk about his home-life, hoping that when the Irishman realised the social and financial eminence of her future situation, he would adopt a more respectful attitude.

"Where are your parents now?" she asked.

"I really don't know exactly. The last letter I got from mother, she was in

Scotland staying with a Lady Dodd, old friends of ours. She's awfully nice but I can't stand her husband. He came up to me once when I was riding in the Row and asked me what omnibus my horse came out of."

O'Hara roared. "Good for Dodd.

"Dodd, Dodd, diddledy Dodd,
Riddledy, diddledy Dodd."

Richard joined in the laughter but Elinor was irritated beyond measure. Not only was this vulgar facetiousness in vile taste but it interrupted an interesting conversation. When the laughter subsided she began again, slightly changing the subject. "They aren't at their country place, then?"

"Oh no. Mother dislikes Elthorne now, we've given it up. It's too close to London: nothing but brick fields. The Fitz-Alans never go there now either. The old lord hates all the new people. I don't blame him."

Richard's accent was on the "I."

She didn't understand. "What new people?"

"Oh, people like us who have bought houses about there. The Fitz-Alans have been there since the Conquest, you see."

Elinor was concerned about the Kurts being new people and in consequence hated by Lord Fitz-Alan. She would have loved to know more about that but this wasn't the moment. Again she changed the subject.

"Where are your sisters now?"

"They go to school in Paris but they'll be joining mother at Dieppe for the holidays."

"Is Dieppe nice?"

"I've never been there. The girls like it; they play tennis and bathe, and mother drives a lot."

This was a subject to pursue. Elinor glanced at the O'Haras as she asked: "What does she drive?"

"Oh, she sends the phaeton and cobs over with the old coachman. She never lets him drive the cobs; his hands are

bad enough with the carriage horses. You should see her pitch into him." He laughed at the recollection.

O'Hara's eyes were fixed with an amused expression on Richard. "What does she say?"

"Tells him she'll discharge him the next time he jabs at their mouths. Sometimes she taps him on the back with her parasol."

"I guess the old lady's got a temper."

Richard's expression changed; his eyes flashed.

"'Old lady,' what do you mean?" He rapped the words out angrily.

O'Hara was taken unprepared. Nothing was further from his intention than to offend. "No harm meant, young feller."

Richard ceased talking from then on and Elinor made no further attempts to draw him out. The ebullition had surprised her. He had never shown temper before but this exhibition proved that he had got one, and it also proved that the

subject of his mother was one which must be approached with caution. She had taken occasion before supper to impress upon Julia the importance of restraining Dennis from indiscreet allusions when bed-time came. And for once he "acted reasonable." Richard bade her good-night at her door as casually as he had Julia just before; he never attempted even to look into the room, let alone enter it, but walked quietly off down the corridor.

She undressed with mingled feelings, which became emotional when she began packing so as to be ready in good time for their early morning departure. The sight of the one side of the valise still untouched, with the straps fastened as when she had so carefully placed the contents there, brought tears to her eyes. "Poor little nightie," she said aloud, as she turned back the partition and extracted the dainty thing, so exquisitely beribboned and scented. She laid it reverently on

the bed and unwrapped from their fresh tissue-paper covering the brand-new silk vest, the hand-embroidered chemise, the iridescent silk petticoat, all the bewitching accessories reserved for an occasion that might have been and was not. How could she help being unhappy at the sight of them? It was so hard to be deprived of everything a girl longed for, had the right to expect, a real trousseau, a proper wedding. These poor little things were all she had to take the place of so much she could never have now. And there they were, not even seen! Life had been very cruel. And yet? She was standing by the bedside refolding them, but she stopped, put her hand to her forehead. He had spoken of another marriage, he wanted a "proper" wedding too. Could it still be done? She returned to her packing, hastily replaced the things, re-strapped the partition. Throwing on her dressing-gown, she ran down the passage and called Julia.

“Juley, come into my room, there’s something I must say to you.”

A moment later the little woman, her black frizzy hair standing up like corkscrews all over her head, flicked into the room and shut the door.

“What is it?” she asked. “You said not to come to-night and I wanted to ever so much.” She was on the tiptoe of curiosity. Elinor threw herself on the bed.

“Juley, I’ve been thinking we’d better keep it secret after all, for a time. Just to see how things go—he wants to have a proper wedding, he said so several times.”

Julia became very serious and lifted her forefinger.

“Now, Nell, it’s no use saying that. I know too much, I’m years older than you are. You’ve got to let me do as I think. You aren’t goin’ to risk your whole lifetime for a wedding, surely?”

Elinor was impressed, indeed her mind was made up to do as her friend advised, but she longed to be comforted.

“Just to think I shall never be a bride. It’s so hard, Juley, it’s so hard,” and she buried her face in the pillow while Julia, deeply touched, comforted her for all she was worth.

CHAPTER IV

i

THE O'Haras had seen them off on the boat and they were steaming back to Manitou. Richard was in sober mood and spoke of their future and his plans. It was agreed that Mrs Colhouse should be informed of the marriage as soon as they arrived and that he would leave the same evening for Cliftonburg. The great thing was to return to his work ; he could do a lot in a short time if he tried, and now it was worth while. It was a cool cloudy day and he wrapped her up and found a spot on the lee-side sheltered from the wind. He was very considerate to her ; she had never felt so fond of him. They got on well together and he told her many things she wanted to know. She was getting to understand everything.

He answered all her questions and hardly asked her any. The more she heard, the more convinced she became that the future would be rosy. Not that he said so. On the contrary, he spoke of it with apprehension, warned her again and again to be prepared for anything. His father would most likely give him nothing when he knew of their engagement; he would certainly not let them come to London, but he hoped he would gradually relent if he worked hard. As the time got shorter and they approached Manitou, he said he hated the thought of leaving her, but he knew if he took her with him it would be "all up" with him. He got more and more tender and affectionate, holding her hand and every now and then kissing her. She had never known anyone like him before, he behaved like a younger brother who was going back to school. Mammy had always said he was a baby. One thing was certain, she herself would have to be the one to

manage everything; she would have to show that he could, that he must, trust to her judgment, do always what she advised.

ii

When they arrived at the cottage Mrs Colhouse was sitting outside her door, as usual talking over the fence to Mrs Shuter, who promptly disappeared at their approach. Telling Richard to stay outside a moment, Elinor kissed her mother and drew her into the sitting-room. "We're married," she said triumphantly.

Mrs Colhouse gave a gasp and, putting her hand to her heart, subsided on to the sofa.

"Married! Nell!"

"So that's done." Elinor subconsciously repeated Richard's words after they had shot the rapids, "but we're only saying we're engaged—for the present."

Mrs Colhouse was too astonished to speak.

“And he’s going back to Cliftonburg to-night. He doesn’t want his father and mother to know till after his uncle gets back and makes it all right with them.”

“To think of your being married to that boy! You scarcely know him.”

“I know him more than you think.”

Without waiting to hear what her mother might say, she went to the door. “Come in, Richard. I’ve told mammy we’re married.”

For an instant the boy looked at her and at her mother, who still sat half-collapsed on the sofa. Then he went forward and, bending down, kissed Mrs Colhouse on the cheek.

“I shall call you mammy now,” he said gaily. “I hope you aren’t upset. Elinor and I thought it the best thing to do; it wasn’t any use writing and—and——” He stopped and looked again from one to the other.

Mrs Colhouse folded her hands, inter-

lacing the fingers, her head was bent and she did not speak.

The boy sat down by her and put his hand on hers. "You aren't unhappy, are you, Mrs Colhouse—mammy, I mean. I know it's rather a—rather hasty—but everything is all right, isn't it, Elinor?"

He looked up at his wife appealingly.

Elinor was thinking how foolishly he was behaving. Why couldn't he be stronger, more manly?

"All right? Of course it is. We love each other, mammy, that's all there is to it, and Richard wanted to make sure of me. But so far as everyone else is concerned, we're only engaged as yet. I'll tell you everything by degrees; there's not much time before he goes."

Elinor took Richard up to her room and brought him a can of water with her own hands.

"Oh, I'm so sorry; thanks, thanks," he

relieved her of it and kissed her. "What a jolly little room." He looked round. "I say, what a lot of clothes!"

Indeed they were everywhere, hung on pegs on the wall, on the door and in band-boxes piled on each other in the corners and even under the bed.

He poured water into the basin, remarking: "I'll hurry up and get out of your way."

What a curious creature he was. He was here in her room, where she slept and had her intimate being, and he was as unconscious of it all, apparently, as though she were his sister. Would he always be like that? She stood an instant looking at him as he plunged his face into the basin, making the water bubble as he snorted in it. Had she gone too fast and too far? Was it possible that she could no longer rely on rousing his feelings? He had shown passion enough that one evening. She went softly out of the room, casting the problem over in her

mind, and had hardly reached the bottom of the stairs when he rejoined her.

At supper a magnificent box of chocolates made its appearance with the name of a well-known New York candy store on the lid. Elinor had herself placed it on the table; it might be a good or a bad move to reveal the name of the sender. She hadn't made up her mind when an innocent comment by Mrs Colhouse settled the question.

“Mr Galton has spread himself, Nell.”

Elinor looked at Richard. His face was black, and from then on he was silent.

Ought she to be pleased or the reverse? It certainly gratified her to see that he cared enough to be so violently jealous, for it could be nothing but jealousy. But she didn't intend giving up her right to harmless attentions such as boxes of candy.

They had no sooner risen from the table than he led her outside.

He began angrily: “How dare that cad

Galton send you that box of sweets. You oughtn't to accept presents from him ; you know the sort of man he is."

"How was I to know who sent it? I saw a box addressed to me and opened it, and there was his card inside."

"You ought to have sent it back. Give it to me. I'll jolly well show him that——"

"Richard, dear, don't be angry about nothing. It would make me ridiculous if you were to send it back now ; we've eaten half the top layer."

"I wish I'd known. Look here, Elinor, don't you write him. Give me his beastly card and I'll answer him. Where is it?"

"I don't know, I think I threw it away." Elinor had carefully preserved it, regarding the superscription : "To the loveliest of southern belles from her fervent admirer" as highly flattering.

"Will you promise me never to write to him?" Richard spoke earnestly.

"Yes, dearest, I do promise you. You have a right to it."

He seized her hand and, kissing it, said: "Thank you; thank you."

They went in and sat down together on the sofa. Mrs Colhouse had disappeared, the help was clearing the table.

"The thought of that man Gálton reminds me of Cliftonburg. He makes me long for England. I believe I'm homesick."

Elinor had never in her life experienced that emotion and could not imagine it.

"You see, here in America no one cares about anything but money or what they call amusement. Everything seems to be moving, everyone is in a hurry, there's no time for anything. I like to sit down and read sometimes or have a quiet talk, but at Cliftonburg they never stop at home: they're either at business or in bars. I do hate the place." He broke off abruptly.

She thoroughly disliked her own people,

but her idea of life was certainly not sitting in one's house and reading.

"I can't tell you how I hate going back to Cliftonburg. The governor's one idea is work—work for its own sake. He'd rather walk up hill than drive just because it's more disagreeable, and yet he always says he doesn't want me to go into his business."

"Not go into his business! Surely you don't mean to miss such a chance as that?"

"I suppose it would be the best way to make money. But I want to know Europe and see beautiful things and read and think. That's living: sitting in an office isn't."

For Elinor, Europe was Paris and London, and perhaps Switzerland, where she knew people went to see the mountains. She had also heard that Rome was fashionable and she knew that several New York society girls had married Italian princes and counts. But this idea of moving about to see what he called

beautiful things and think about them, must be crushed at all costs. The idea of settling down to a small income in order to loaf, when he could make a pile, once he got into his father's business! She must get that out of his head.

“Richard, dear, haven't you got a little off the track? You said you meant to work for my sake, didn't you, and that you could do a lot in a short time so that when your uncle got back he'd put things right.”

He jumped up and took a few steps as though he were shaking something off, then plopped down beside her again on the sofa.

“Of course, dear girl, of course. You're quite right. I'll stick to my work; you can count on me.” He put his arm round her and kissed her. She determined to improve the occasion.

“Believe me, Richard,” she said, with great earnestness, “money is the one thing that matters; you can do all the

other things afterwards. I've seen enough to know. Leisure means loafing. My father had that sort of notion about money not mattering and poor mammy and I have paid for it. You don't want me to go on paying all my life, do you?"

He kissed her again. "You shan't pay. I'll work. I promise you I'll work as I never have before. Now I shall be going in a few minutes. I haven't got much money but I can——" He put his hand into his inner pocket.

She stopped him at once. "Not a cent, Richard—not till we're together. I couldn't."

"Why not? You're my wife now."

She half closed her eyes and looked away sadly. "Not properly yet, dear."

He ran his hand through his hair and held it over his forehead; he seemed to be puzzling over his reply.

"Not properly yet," he repeated; "no." He dropped on his knees beside her and grasped her hand, holding it to his lips.

“But it must be so—it must—for a time. I shall always be thinking of you. Promise me, if you need anything you’ll tell me. I shan’t spend anything scarcely from now on. I shall save every penny for you.”

Elinor leant forward and kissed him softly. “I promise.”

“I shan’t go anywhere or see anyone. I shall just work. In a few weeks Uncle Theo will be back, and then——” He kissed her again and strained her to him. When he lifted his head, tears were in his eyes. “I only realise now how I hate leaving you.” He stood up, gazing at her. “If only my mother knew you!”

When he had gone she sat down and wrote to Mr Galton, scolding him for sending the candies which were delicious, but telling him he mustn’t write to her or send her anything now as she was engaged to Richard Kurt. Perhaps they would meet again after she was married.

iii

During the forty-eight hours following Richard's departure Elinor was surprised at her own calmness. Considering the uncertainty of her situation she had good reason to feel apprehensive. An affectionately worded telegram had duly reached her. It was now followed by a missive of a different description, over which she was still puzzling. It had been written in the train and was in the form of a poem, called *The Song of the Wheel*. It was absurd, of course, but it afforded proof of his continuous thought of her during his journey. There were certain lines she could not understand and they stuck in her head, absorbed though she was in edging a reconstructed bodice with *passementerie*. She laid down her work and read it again :

Bumpety-bump, jinkety-jink
The wheels roll on
As I wretchedly think.
Tear along, rush along,

Hurry and speed,
Give me the furious help that I need
To stay my remorse,
To turn me to steel.
Save my heart and my soul
From destruction, O wheel!

What did it mean? What was the remorse about and why did he want to be turned into steel? And why were his heart and soul in danger of destruction? After several minutes of brow-contracting reflection Elinor gave it up and went on with her work, deciding that it wasn't worth bothering about and just meant nothing at all.

Something more exciting drove the silly rhyme out of her head. Mrs Colhouse entered the room with a telegram.

"Cliftonburg papers announce marriage of course am denying everything as you will writing.
Kurt."

She read it over again, threw down her work and exclaimed "It's all out."

Tiresome as usual, mammy looked grave.

"I can't see why you should be pleased at that."

"Oh, can't you? Well, send that slut for a paper."

Elinor quickly threw off her *négligé*, dressed herself and went downstairs.

Her mother was poring over the paper. She seized it from her and read

ROMANTIC RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

SOUTHERN BELLE ELOPES WITH
WEALTHY ENGLISHMAN

EARL'S GRANDSON WEDS DAUGHTER
OF DR COLHOUSE OF WATERVILLE

According to the whole-column account, Miss Elinor Colhouse, daughter of the celebrated physician Dr Colhouse of Waterville, famed for her beauty even in a land where beauty was a woman's birthright, had eloped with Mr Richard Kurt, son of Mr William Kurt, the world-famous banker of London, and nephew of the honoured

president of the C. W. & M. "It will interest our readers to hear that Mr Richard Kurt's mother is of a noble English family, though her son, with true patrician modesty, does not advertise the fact." The article terminated by wishing happiness to the young couple.

At the first reading Elinor's eagerness was so great that she only skimmed it, the second time she felt that she had not read it as thoroughly as it deserved, the third time she read it aloud.

Mrs Colhouse gazed speechlessly at Elinor who calmly folded the paper and put it under the clock on the mantelpiece. "Now, I'm going out for a little."

"Do you think that's right, Nell? You're sure to meet someone who'll ask questions."

"Suppose I do? I guess I'll know what to say."

"Are you going to deny it?"

"I shan't say one way or the other."

She didn't mean to miss the full enjoy-

ment to be got out of the sensation and made straight for the hotel. While she was asking the reception clerk to reserve a good double bedroom and bathroom for a friend she was expecting, someone addressed her by name. Turning round, she found herself face to face with Mr M'Alpin.

"Oh, Miss Colhouse" he gasped effusively "may I congratulate you? We're all thrilled by the news."

Elinor drew herself up and stared blankly at him. "What news?" she asked with hauteur.

"Isn't it true then?"

"I don't know what you're alluding to?"

With an expression of astonishment he fetched *The Detroit Free Press* and pointed with his finger at the front page. Taking it from him, she read it through and lifted her eyebrows. "They seem to know all about it."

She handed the paper back and bowed coldly. Passing through the midst of a

number of guests whose gestures showed that they had been closely observing M'Alpin and herself she departed with dignity.

As she had anticipated, the next morning brought her a telegram from Richard announcing his arrival the following day, adding, however, something she was less prepared for but which delighted her still more.

"Be ready accompany me back here."

She gave it to her mother to read.

"So he's going to take you back with him?"

"Of course he is and I've ordered a room at the hotel."

"A room at the hotel—what for?"

"For Richard and myself of course. Now I guess we'll get busy, mammy. There's that mauve *crêpe de Chine* to finish and the red blouse. You can send the black taffeta on."

She met Richard at the station. His face was pallid, there were dark lines under his eyes. But his clothes to her satisfaction were as immaculate as ever.

He embraced her warmly but his manner was serious.

"I've taken a room at the hotel," she said.

"I don't want to go there. I want to go somewhere we can talk."

"Of course, dear, I meant we can sleep there."

A look of sudden realisation crossed his features. "Oh, of course! Isn't there a room for me at the cottage? Anything will do for one night. We'll leave by the morning train. Are you ready?"

"Packed to the last hairpin," she answered like a competent quartermaster-general.

"I'll just leave my bag at the cottage for now, I want to be in the air. I haven't

slept a wink, my head feels as if it would burst."

They walked out of the station, she with her arm in his.

"Tell me everything, Richard, from the beginning."

"I will—gradually. You must give me time. My brain's not working yet. I tried to write but I had to give it up. Besides, everything's changed now."

"I got the poem."

"The poem," he repeated, adding as though in an afterthought "Oh, that. That's all changed too, everything's changed——" he stood still. "I don't know where I am—really." He looked closely at her, his eyes wandered down her. She had a light-coloured linen skirt and wore a fawn foulard scarf round her neck. They were standing at the side of the dusty road under a tree to let a buggy pass. Elinor recognised M'Alpin driving his trotting horse and ignored his salutation. Richard put his bag down and

fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, extracting a little cardboard box, out of which he took a tiny package of tissue paper. "Take off your glove, dear."

The glove fitted closely; he was impatient, shaky. Intending to help her, he pulled at the finger-tips and let the ring fall into a heap of dust.

"I don't see why you had to do that now—in the public road."

He was stooping down and looking for the ring. "I couldn't wait" he said without looking up "here it is."

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped it carefully, took the third finger of her left hand and slipped the ring over it. "It's rather large, I'm afraid——" holding her fingers in his palm, "I thought you'd like it better than the ordinary affair."

She twisted the little curb chain round and round her tapering finger with its long, pointed nail, looking at it critically.

"It's very pretty: so unusual."

At the cottage Mrs Colhouse was discreetly out of the way. Richard deposited his bag.

“Let’s go out at once,” he said.

She stood in front of him. She knew she was looking simple, sweet, captivating, and he behaved as though he saw nothing. What was he made of?

Suddenly as though a new idea had struck him, he put his arm round her waist and kissed her several times.

“I thought you’d forgotten my existence.”

He took hold of her hand. “You mustn’t judge me now. I’m not altogether responsible.”

They walked slowly in the direction of the lake. He stopped again in that sudden way of his.

“Let’s go where we went that first day.”

She made use of the glance with half-closed lids. It was a good serviceable expression, meaning several different things and applicable in varying situations. It was at once equivocal and eloquent. The

moment pointed to the vanity of words, they were both face to face with fact, they were married.

They reached the gate, the bars of which lay on the ground, apparently as they had left them. He stood looking at them, then at her. They went on slowly and in silence. She could observe him cautiously out of the corner of her eye, his were on the ground.

They reached the felled trees and again he stood still observing them as though he wanted to photograph them on his mind. He threw down his stick and laid his jacket on them as before. "Wait a second though." He picked up the jacket again and feeling in the pockets, took out a folded newspaper, a cigarette-case and matches. She sat down and he lighted a cigarette, seating himself in front of her on the scrubby grass. He drew a deep whiff or two.

"The first person I saw when I got to Cliftonburg was a chap called Jim Baldwin,

and the first thing he did was to stick the damned *Enquirer* under my nose. Here it is."

Elinor took the paper. Except for additional embroidery suitable to Cliftonburg taste, it was a duplicate of what she had already seen. She passed the paper back to him without comment; it seemed wisest to say nothing.

"You can imagine my feelings. If it was in *The Enquirer*, it would be in every paper in the States. Jim stared at me with a silly grin on his face, waiting to hear what I had to say." Richard stopped and looked at her. "I know you're thinking what a fool I was to deny it. I dare say I was a fool. Anyhow, it doesn't matter now one way or the other. I was thinking, how did it come out? who's done this? while I was denying it. Naturally Jim didn't believe me, said it was sure to come out. But I stuck to it like Peter and kept repeating "It's a damned lie," hardly knowing what I was

saying. In a place like Cliftonburg more people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows."

Elinor thought he uttered the last words bitterly.

He lit another cigarette. "It seemed to me that everyone had read that damned paper, with its grandson of an earl, world-famous banker and the rest of it. I felt I could sink into the ground with humiliation. I shall never forget that morning, not if I live for ever. It's the awful ghastly caddishness of it all."

Elinor couldn't for the life of her see it in that light. She understood his being taken by surprise and worried by their marriage coming out; it had upset all his plans and he was naturally afraid of the consequences, but she failed to see anything humiliating in the publicity from any point of view. As far as she personally was concerned, it was a glorious triumph. Whether he was the grandson of an earl or not everyone would think so and that

was what mattered. But she had no intention of telling him how she felt; on the contrary she would adopt his point of view externally.

“Yes. It is caddish of course but you know what newspapers are.”

“Caddish. American papers are the most poisonous on earth. They’re unfit for—for—I won’t say what they’re unfit for and the men who write for them are unscrupulous blackguards. The fellow who stuck that in ought to be horse-whipped. And if I knew who he was, I’d——”

Elinor almost gasped her relief. So he didn’t suspect even now!

He mastered his anger and began again.

“I couldn’t face going to the office. I took a cable car instead and went right up to Chestnut Hills—out into the country—I wanted to go where I could think. I must have walked a longish way and all the time I was turning things over

in my mind. But I couldn't decide. At the end I was as uncertain as at the beginning. When I got back, there were three reporters waiting for me. Was it true that I was married, *The Evening Post* said it had authority to deny it? Was that true? I told them I had nothing to say, that whether I was married or unmarried concerned nobody but the lady and myself." He blew a long breath through his lips without looking at Elinor. He had been talking as though his narrative concerned no one in particular, as though it were more than anything else a relief to his own feelings. She had been following the recital intently, anxious not to miss a word. She saw herself cast for the most interesting part in the drama. All over the American continent people would be reading about her, it was intensely moving and exciting.

"There's more yet. While I was getting rid of the reporters, the telephone rang. It was Dr Flössheim. He's my

uncle's best friend in America. It was he who sent me north because I'd had rather a bad go of a sort of cholera."

"Is he a Jew?"

"Yes, I suppose so. He's far and away the whitest man in Cliftonburg, the only European. I went straight off to see him. You don't know how I felt when he put his arm on my shoulder." He turned his head away to master himself. "I tried to deny it all at first but he knew at once and I knew he knew. He told me there was nothing to be ashamed of. I might have been foolish or wise, that depended on the girl. He asked who you were and I told him all I knew. It wasn't much, of course. I told him your father was a doctor and lived in Water-ville and he took a directory of doctors' names off the top of his writing-desk, but he couldn't find your father's. He asked me if I was sure your father was a doctor. I told him of course. He didn't say any more about that but

asked me about you. And I told him everything——”

Elinor started. “Everything? What do you mean by everything?”

“I told him how pretty you are and how I’d fallen in love with you and all that and how we’d gone up to St Mary’s and I couldn’t—I couldn’t—you know what I mean.”

Elinor was roused. For the first time she had a feeling of discomfort, if not apprehension. She sat up straight and looked very sharply at him.

“No; I don’t know. What did you say—exactly?”

“I said that I had meant only to be engaged to you but that—that it wouldn’t have been fair to you—that I felt I couldn’t leave you like that and that we both decided to get married and keep it a secret. And I told him about the O’Haras being there—and all that.”

Richard had ceased speaking to the air,

he was looking her straight in the face now. Elinor listened eagerly.

“What did he say then?”

“I don’t think he said anything. He took up a paper and handed it to me, it was a cable from my Uncle Theo. I don’t remember the words exactly, something like this :

“New York Herald Paris states Richard married. His parents very anxious kindly obtain information and cable fully.”

Richard pulled out a cigarette and lit it, rose to his feet and took a few steps, then stood in front of her again.

“When I read that, I felt as though the ground had given way under me. Of course I was a damned fool not to have realised that it would be cabled over but up to that second it never occurred to me. I read it over and over again. Those words on that bit of paper were Uncle Theo’s. It seemed impossible—so quickly,

before I'd had time even to think, before I could write and explain or do anything, I don't remember what I said then. The next thing I recall is that he showed me a cable he had been writing. I remember that:

“‘Richard married to very nice girl cable instructions.’

‘I shall send this now,’ he said, ‘and your uncle will receive it in London to-morrow morning. Go to Manitou at once and bring her back here. By to-morrow evening I shall have a reply.’ Before he said good-bye he told me not to worry, he was sure everything would be all right. Now my people knew, I could be above-board. And I thought of how much worse it might have been. If it hadn't been for him I should have gone on denying it and——” He laughed in a curious forced way so that she stared at him, surprised.

“What's coming is the best. The next

morning I'd packed my bag and was having breakfast when all of a sudden I heard a loud voice in the hall. I went to the door and there I saw a short, thick-set chap. He was shouting in old darkie Enoch's ear that he wanted to see me. When he caught sight of me, he came forward and said: 'Mr Richard Kurt, I want a word with you.' I took him into the dining-room. 'I'm Joe Colhouse. Are you married to my sister or are you not? That's what I'm here to know.'"

Richard jumped to his feet and laughed again.

"I don't see anything funny in that, American men feel that way about the honour of their women."

Richard laughed no longer. "We soon made friends, Joe's a very good sort. He showed me his pistol, he called it a gun, and told me that he was right glad he hadn't shown it to me another way. He's coming to meet us at Cliftonburg as soon as we get

there. I've got to the end of my story now."

He threw himself down on the grass and rested his forehead on his arms.

"Then we might as well go back to the cottage," Elinor suggested. He had apparently told her all there was to tell and it was getting late; supper would be ready and they had to get up to the hotel.

They walked along some distance in silence till he said: "I want your mother to know everything."

Elinor wondered why he said that. "Of course you can tell it all over again to her if you like." She was unable to resist putting a contemptuous tone into her voice.

He shot a quick glance at her. "Thanks, I don't think I'll do that. I'm not pleased enough with myself to want to repeat it."

She was puzzled again. Why couldn't he say what he meant instead of implying

all sorts of things? "What are you specially displeased about?" she asked.

He seemed to close his lips and he didn't look at her as he answered; "Everything."

"I suppose you include our being married." She was being purposely provocative. She would rather have it out and have done with it.

"Since you ask me, yes," he answered firmly.

She stood still.

"You mean you wish you hadn't married me?"

Something within drove her forward, drove her as a murderer is driven to the spot where he committed his crime.

"Look here, Elinor. Don't make me say things I don't want to say. You know I never wanted to get married—in this sort of way. But we are married and whatever happens, I'm going to do all I can."

"Oh, I see." Elinor's expression and

voice were impregnated with irony. "You're going to do your duty under the disagreeable circumstances."

"I never said that. What I said before, I say again. It was wrong to get married without my telling my people and I'm afraid of your suffering through it. That's what I meant when I said I wanted your mother to know everything. I want her to know what I said on the boat and afterwards on the bridge at St Mary's. I want her to know that I really did try to prevent all this happening."

His voice dropped as he uttered the last words. They were still standing at the entrance to the little wood, the gate with its bars off was just in front of them.

"What happening?" Elinor simply couldn't grasp what he was alluding to.

"Can't you see what I mean? The whole thing. The shock to my people, the disgusting papers, your brother coming after me as though I were a sort of—I don't know what."

Certainly the Joe episode had unnecessarily complicated matters, but what did he want to harp on that for?

"No one need know anything about Joe if you don't tell them."

"Tell them!" he looked as if she'd struck him. "I'd rather—oh, Elinor—I wish you could see what I mean. I think your mother will understand better. That's why I want her to know."

They walked on but she was still mystified. What did he want, anyway? So far as she could see, everything had turned out uncommonly well.

v

Reaching the cottage, they found Mrs Colhouse awaiting them eagerly. Yet another telegram had arrived. It was addressed to Richard.

"Uncle cables you are to take your wife to his house see me on arrival."

"Flössheim."

Elinor ran her eyes over it. "We're

to go to Richard's uncle's house at once, mammy."

"Your uncle is fine!" Mrs Colhouse exclaimed.

Richard made no observation. He had taken the telegram from Elinor's hand and was reading it over and over again as though he couldn't believe the words.

"Of course he would do that. It's the right way to behave. I'm his niece now." Elinor was exceedingly pleased, so pleased that going close to Richard, whose eyes were still glued to the telegram, she put her arm round his neck and kissed him. "You'll see, everything will go well now, dear. Don't worry any more." Then releasing him. "Let's have supper, mammy; we've got to go to the hotel, remember, and time's getting on."

Richard looked up, still holding the telegram. "I say, don't let's go to that beastly hotel."

Elinor faced round. "You don't seem to remember there's no room here."

"I don't care. I'll sleep on the sofa."

What sort of a man was he anyway? Within ten minutes was a nice comfortable room, she was his newly married wife; and he preferred sleeping uncomfortably on a sofa alone. She had engaged the room and M'Alpin had seen them. Up there in the brightly lit hotel everyone would be agog to see them, to see her, the heroine of a romance. She had pictured it all. They would pass through the crowded hall, ignoring everyone. It would take a few minutes for the clerk to get the key and accompany them to the elevator. Very likely M'Alpin had sent flowers up to their room. Everyone's eyes would be upon her, all the girls would be wild with envy. Was she to forgo all this without a struggle?

She took him upstairs to her room after supper, showed him her two beautifully packed trunks, and a large New York hatbox; she was rightly proud of her accomplished packing.

“And here’s my grip, everything for the night, and I’ve arranged for the express people to call for the trunks in the morning. I thought you’d want to be alone with me, dear.” She turned her eyes down and tucked in the lacy neck of the nightgown within the bag while she spoke. She couldn’t be so unrefined as to give him more than a very slight hint. Would he take it?

“I quite understand, dear, very thoughtful of you. But I can’t face the music, I’m worn out. The thought of a hotel to-night freezes me. I’d much rather sleep on the sofa downstairs.”

From the finality in his tone she knew she would have to abandon her project. It was evident that he was incapable of appreciating a girl’s feelings, especially such a girl as she was. He understood nothing. This might be the very last time she would ever see Manitou, that Manitou would see her. Yet she must slink off like a little nobody. Romance

alone entitled her to play her part but she must be deprived of it just because he was disinclined to go to a hotel. And he was unfeeling besides. It didn't occur to him that he was humiliating her by showing he preferred being alone on this first night that they could openly and without fear of consequences be man and wife in fact as well as in name. She wasn't an animal kind of woman, thank God.

"You needn't think I'm specially anxious to share a room with you." Her resentment had boiled over, she couldn't keep the words back.

He was standing beside her leaning against the bed with his hand on the edge of the bag. At these words he stepped away and glared at her.

"Elinor. How can you speak like that? I don't understand you."

She drew herself up haughtily. "So I observe. I shouldn't try if I were you." She turned sharply and walked out of the room.

He followed her slowly downstairs and seating himself near her mother, began talking as though nothing special had happened.

It was maddening her to see how little he cared but she wouldn't show it. The sooner he learnt that she could be as indifferent as he was, the better!

After supper mammy with her usual tactlessness proposed that he should have her room; she'd go and prepare it at once, Nell and she could sleep together for that one night.

Richard would not have that, he would sleep on the sofa, he said.

Elinor did not stay to hear the argument out; she had had enough. "Fight it out between you. Good-night."

He could sleep on the doormat for all she cared.

THE END



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